

Robt. H. Gransell
London June 1853
SEVERAL
DISCOURSES
UPON
REPENTANCE,
THE
SEVERITY
AND THE
GOODNESS of God.

By the Reverend
Dr. RICHARD LUCAS
late Prebendary of Westminster.

Publsh'd from the Originals, by his Son
RICHARD LUCAS, M. A.

To which is added,
A Discourse against DESPAIR,
by the same Author.
Printed from a Corrected Manuscript.

L O N D O N:
Printed for JOHN WYAT, at the Rose in
St. Paul's Church-yard. 1717.

Wm. H. K. ...
London ... 1853

DISCOURSED
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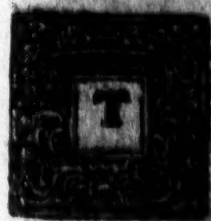
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TO THE
Right Honourable
Sir Peter King, K^t
Lord CHIEF JUSTICE
OF HIS
Majesty's COURT
OF
COMMON-PLEAS

My LORD,



HE Honour your
LORDSHIP did me,
by your Recommenda-
tion in an Affair,
which probably may have long
A 3 since

The Dedication.

since escap'd your Memory, (so common are the Instances of your Goodness) is what encourages me to take the Boldness of giving you this farther Trouble. And this I do with the greater Hopes of obtaining your Pardon; because it is no more than what I might otherwise reasonably promise my self, from your known Favour to whatever Works have a Tendency to the Increasing of an humble Piety and substantial Religion amongst Men.

It is this your Regard to Religion, which, no doubt, has a large Share in the securing that Honour, with which your other Vir-

tu-
tues

The Dedication.

tues and extraordinary Abilities, as well in Affairs of State, and Course of Business, as in all kinds of Learning, both Divine and Human, have been deservedly receiv'd and entertain'd in the World.

An Honour so generally paid your LORDSHIP, that should I imitate the common Custom of *Dedicators*, in an Attempt to give your CHARACTER in a long and elaborate Panegyric, I cou'd not (whilst I should have as many Witnesses as Readers) have any occasion to fear *their* common Fate too, of seeming guilty of Flattery.

The Dedication.

But *that* which might be my Warrant to justify my utmost Industry in the Performance, shall plead my Excuse for the total Neglect of any Endeavour towards it; because it is impossible for too little to be said by me, when so much is said by All. Leaving this superfluous Task, therefore, I shall only beg Leave to congratulate your LORDSHIP upon a Happiness so rare, as well in Kind as Degree; I mean the just Respect and Regard, with which all Persons (whatever Things besides they differ in) agree to treat your LORDSHIP's Character.

The Dedication.

For in this divided Age, where
Malice and *Passion* have slipp'd the
Reins, and seem without Restraint
to exercise an uncontroll'd Sway,
no Vice may possibly escape un-
observed; and if observed, unex-
posed. It remains then, that no-
thing less than a strict Integrity,
supported by a Resolution not to
be overcome by Danger, or warp-
ed by Interest, guarded with a
Prudence of Conduct not to be
abus'd or impos'd upon by cun-
ningly-contrived Falshoods, or sly
Insinuations, and all this attended
with an universal Charity, can be
sufficient to gain a common and
avowed Love and Esteem. And
may I not hope that others, from
your

The Dedication.

your LORDSHIP's great Example, may at length learn what is valuable in Life, and endeavour to receive the same Acknowledgments from Mankind, not by any *Bye* or *New Path*, but by the same old *Highway* of becoming their common BENEFACTOR, and a steady and vigorous Pursuit of Truth and Justice in all Cases, without Exception; which leads directly to the most valuable Testimony of our own Minds first, and next (if any can) to that of the World.

In the mean Time, I shall ever look upon my self bound to wish that your Sun may never be clouded, but always shine with the
same

The Dedication.

same apparent, as well as inherent Lustre, to the last Period of Life: That in Fulness of Years and Honour, leaving your happy *Posterity* your Blessing, your Estate, and the Reflexion of your Glory, you may die full of Satisfaction as to your Life past, and big with the Expectation of a better, I am,

My LORD, (as oblig'd,)

Your Lordship's most Humble,

and most Obedient Servant,

Richard Lucas.

T H E

The Dedication

I have appeared as well as in the
past to the last of
the in the of
and having you happy
and your living your living
and the of your
you may be of
in your life and
the of a better

(Signed)

Your obedient servant

John Smith

Jan 17 AP 66

THE

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you, turn you from your Evil Ways;
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[The First Sermon on the foregoing Text.]

1 COR. XV. 9, 10.

For I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the Grace of God I am what I am: And the Grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I labour'd more abundantly than they all: Yet not I, but the Grace of God which was with me. Page 197

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not grieved; thou dost admonish them,
but they have refused to receive Cor-
rection: they have made their Faces
harder than a Rock, they have refus'd
to return.* Page 232

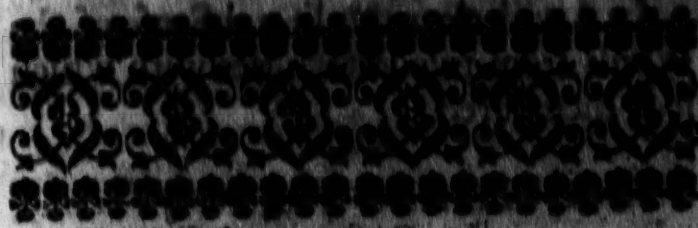
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MATT. 5. 4.

*Blessed are they that mourn, for they
shall be comforted.*

17 APR 1861



SERMON I.

The Barren Fig-tree cursed.

MARK xi. 13.

And seeing a Fig-tree afar off, having Leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but Leaves; for the time of Figs was not yet.



THE Consequence of this Vol. III. was, our Lord curs'd the Fig-tree, and presently it withered away. Mat. 21. 19.

In handling these Words, I shall follow this Method:

B I I

Vol. III. I. I will clear the literal Sense of the
 Words from two Difficulties with which
 it is incumbred.

II. I will shew you, very briefly,
 what was the Design and Purpose of
 our Lord, in this whole Action.

III. I will raise Two Practical Ob-
 servations from the Whole, for our
 own Instruction.

I. I'll begin with the *First*. Saint
Matthew reports this History very
 clearly, by telling us only what our
 Lord did: But *St. Mark* has occa-
 sion'd much Perplexity and Dispute,
 by adding these two Expressions, if
haply he might find any thing thereon;
 and that other, *for the time of Figs*
was not yet.

From the *First*, 'tis natural to make
 this Objection. Our *Saviour's* Expecta-
 tions seem to have been rais'd, by seeing
 a Fig-tree afar off, having Leaves, and
 afterwards to have been frustrated and
 disappointed; for when he came to it,
 he found nothing but Leaves. He hop'd
 for Relief for his Hunger; he imagin'd
 that

that there might be Fruit upon a Tree, Ser. I.
that promis'd well at a Distance, but
was in Effect deceiv'd. How can this
consist with the Perfection of our Lord,
to be mistaken and deceiv'd? But
this Difficulty is capable of an easie Solu-
tion several ways: For,

1. I can't think it any Disparage-
ment to our Lord, or repugnant to the
Truth of Scripture, if we acknowledge
that Outward Objects made the same
Impression on our Saviour which they
did on other Men, and that in merely
Naturals he acted as other Men na-
turally do. Thus the Fig-tree present-
ing it self to his sight when he was
hungry, rais'd in him the same Desire
it would have done in another. Hunger
was a Natural Appetite, and our Saviour
was to satisfy it by Natural and Ordina-
ry Ways; he never wrought Miracles
where there was no need of them, nor
any great End to be serv'd by 'em; he
therefore sends away his Disciples to
buy Provision, and asks for Water of John 4:
the Samaritan Woman; when, with-
out doubt, he might have furnish'd
himself with both, if he had pleas'd,
by a Miracle. So he demands of Martha
and Mary, concerning Lazarus, Where John 11.
have ye laid him? When, if he had 34

Vol. III. thought fit, he needed to have consulted nothing but the Spirit within him. Nor is any thing of this Nature inconsistent with the Hypostatic Union, or the Fulness of the Spirit in Christ, for notwithstanding either or both of these, our Lord was truly and really Man, and as such, was subject to all the Imperfections and Infirmities proper to Human Nature, Sin only excepted. And thus St. Luke tells us of him, that *he increased in Wisdom and Stature, and in favour with God and Man.* I know what subtil Comments some have made on these Words; but it is plain, the Evangelist designs to inform us, that Jesus improv'd in Mind and Body; and to give any other Sense of this Passage, is not to interpret, but contradict the Scripture. Now if this be so, 'tis evident, that he who encreases in Knowledge, knows that to Day, which he did not Yesterday; and is ignorant of that to Day, which he may come to know to Morrow. Nor indeed is it easie to conceive how our Lord should be truly Man, and not arrive at Knowledge by degrees. Man is not born with a Stock of all the Idea's and Notices that he is ever to have, but he gains 'em by degrees; nor does he

Heb. 4: 13.

Luke 2.
52.

he know by Intuition, but by Reasoning, i. e. by inferring one thing from another, or comparing one thing with another; this is one easie way of solving this Difficulty. St. Mark attributes no Imperfection to our Lord here, but such as Humane Nature did necessarily subject him to; and Morality being no way concern'd in the Point, there was no reason why the Spirit should inform our Lord, of what his Eyes could not at that Distance.

Bar. J.

But the Truth is, I have not said all this concerning the Infirmities and Imperfections of the Human Nature in *Christ*, for the sake of the Difficulty in my Text, for that may be remov'd without it; but only have taken Occasion, from my Text, to set this Matter in a good Light before you: because the want of observing it, is wont to breed a great Confusion in the Minds of Men, whilst they seem to talk and think as if the Divinity in *Christ* had swallow'd up the Humanity.

We are then to know, That the Knowledge of *Christ* may be consider'd in Three different Ways; either as Divine, Human, or Inspir'd and Prophetical. His Divine Knowledge, as he was God, was Infallible and Infinite;

Vol. III. his Human, as he was Man, was acquir'd by degrees, and mix'd with much Uncertainty; his Inspir'd Knowledge, as he was a Prophet, was finite and limited. It is with relation to the First sort St. Peter must be understood to speak, when he said, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.* Of our Saviour's Human Knowledge, we may, if we will, suppose St. Mark to speak here in my Text. And, Lastly, Of his Prophetical Knowledge, our Lord speaks himself, in those Words, *But of that Day and that Hour knoweth no Man, no not the Angels which are in Heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.* Another Instance of which we have in the beginning of the Book of the Revelations, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his Servants things which must shortly come to pass.* But,

2. Our Saviour did often act upon very different Motives and Reasons, from what did appear at first to the Spectator. His Actions as well as Discourses were instructive, and there was often a Moral in his Behaviour as well as in his Parables. Thus, when he girded himself about and wash'd his Disciples Feet, he had a farther Design

John 21.
17.

Mark 13.
32.

Rev. 1. 1.

John 13.

in it than to minister unto them and Ser. I.
 cleanse them, namely, to instruct them
 in the Duty of Humility in the most
 sensible and moving way; and yet none
 of them comprehended this, till they
 were taught it by our *Lord* himself.
 And thus it was here, our *Lord* went
 to the barren Fig-tree, not really to
 satisfy his Hunger, but to instruct his
 Disciples; to shew them in this barren
 Fig-tree (which he cursed, for its Bar-
 renness, and which immediately wi-
 thered away, upon this Curse) the
 Fate of *Jerusalem*, and at the same
 time to inculcate to them the Necessity
 of Fruitfulness, and the Danger of Bar-
 renness. But this was what our *Saviour*
 did not then expound to 'em, nor they
 comprehend; and therefore *St. Mark*
 records this Story just as it was done,
 and assigns such a Reason for our *Lord's*
 going to the Fig-tree, as then appear'd
 to him, for he penetrated no farther;
 he look'd upon it as a Natural, not
 Parabolical Action; and therefore ima-
 gin'd that there was only a Natural,
 not Moral Reason for it. According
 to this Account, it is plain, that our
Saviour was so far from being deceiv'd
 and mistaken, that he had not gone to
 this Fig-tree, had he not well known

Vol. III, that it was barren, for no other wou'd have answer'd his Purpose.

The *next* Difficulty, in the literal Sense of the *Text*, arises from those Words, *For the Time of Figs was not yet*. If this be understood as the Words sound, That it was so early in the Year, that Leaves were the most that the Fig-tree yet had put forth; this indeed will be a good Reason why there was only Leaves on it: but then the Expectation of Fruit was unreasonable; and the Curling the Tree, for want of it, more unreasonable still.

The next Interpretation, That *the Time of ripe Figs was not yet*, is more weak than the former; for if this was granted, we might still be at a loss to account for our Lord's going to it.

Dr. Hammond's Interpretation, That it was not a good Fig-Year, seems to me to mend the Matter very little; for according to this Sense, it was owing to the Unseasonableness of the Weather, not Barrenness of the Tree, that the Tree had *nothing but Leaves* on it. Nor cou'd this Tree have been a fit Emblem of the People of the *Jews*, who never wanted Means of Grace at any time, but never enjoy'd more than they did then.

Heinsius

Heinsius corrects the Text, (a) and Ser. I. then gives us this Exposition, That in that Place where Christ was, it was the Time of Figs, for that Fruit was earlier there than elsewhere. This indeed might pass well enough, was it not a bold thing to attempt to alter the Text, without the Warrant of any one ancient Copy.

Others suppose, That this was a peculiar sort of Fig-tree, whose Fruit did not come to Maturity 'till the second, or sometimes 'till the third Year after it came forth; so that our Lord might very well expect Fruit on this kind of Tree, when there was none as yet to be found on another.

And this Sense, for ought I can see, if Naturalists will allow us such a sort of a Tree, will do well enough. There lies only one Objection against it, which is this: Several Interpreters have prov'd, That the Time when our Saviour came to this Tree, being just after the Hosanna's, and immediately before the Passover, was really the Season when

(a) Reading of the Hebrew text, for the word 'Figs' is used.

Vol. III. Figs were generally ripe in *Judea*, being the Time when the *Jews* offered up their First-Fruits.

Lev. 21.

16.

None of these Expositions being thoroughly Satisfactory, I will take the Liberty to advance another, and that is this; It was not yet the Time when Figs were gather'd, carried in, and laid up. That this is the Signification of the Word *Kauçç*, when applied to Fruit, is evident from *Mark 12. 2. And at the Season he sent to the Husbandmen a Servant, that he might receive from the Husbandmen of the Fruit of the Vineyard. And from Mat. 21. 41. And will let out his Vineyard unto other Husbandmen, which shall render him the Fruits in their Seasons.*

If it be objected, that this indeed may be a good Reason for our Saviour's expecting Fruit on the Tree, because the Tree was in a flourishing Condition; and it was not to be suppos'd, that the Fruit of it was yet gather'd and carried in; but it can be no Reason why there was nothing found on the Tree but Leaves. I answer, 'tis true, for there must be no Reason rendred for this; for if there cou'd have been a good one, it wou'd prove the Barrenness of the

the Tree excusable, and the Curse of Ser. I. our Lord unreasonable. Nor is it any strange thing in *Scripture* for a Reason to refer to the remoter part of the *Verse*, and not to that which immediately goes before it, of which I cou'd give several Instances, had I not insisted too long already on this Matter, which I should not have done were we not fall'n into an Age which is extremely fond of Objections against *Scripture*, and apt to improve every Difficulty into an Absurdity. Having thus remov'd the Difficulties occurring in the literal Sense of my Text, I proceed to the *Second* General propos'd, namely,

II. To shew you what is the moral Sense and Design of our Saviour in this whole Action. It was a common Thing with the *Prophets* in the *Old* Isa. 20. *Testament*, to express the Threats of Jer. 13. God against the *Jews*, not only by Ezek. 4. Words, but by such symbolical Actions as did after the most lively manner represent their Sin and Punishment. And this is that which our Lord practises here; for *Expositors* are unanimously agreed, That by the Fig-tree, is signified the *Jewish* Nation; by its Barrenness, their Ingratitude and Wickedness; and by

Vol. III. by *Christ's* cursing it, their utter Excision and Extermination. This is the very Thing which our Lord denounced in the Parable of the Vineyard, both in the Chapter immediately following this, and in *Mat. 21.* where the Lord of a Vineyard sends his Servants first, and afterwards his Son, to demand Fruit in its Season of those Husbandmen to whom he had lett it out; and when these Husbandmen, instead of sending Fruit, ill-intreated and slew his Servants first, and then his Son, our Lord makes the Jews themselves Judges in this Case; *When the Lord therefore of the Vineyard cometh, What will he do unto those Husbandmen? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked Men, and will let out his Vineyard unto other Husbandmen, which shall render him the Fruits in their Seasons.* This Sentence our Lord confirms as just; and applying the whole Parable to that People, concludes, ver. 43. *Therefore say I unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a Nation bringing forth the Fruits thereof.* This was what the Prophet *Isaiah* had long before foreseen and foretold in the most moving and eloquent manner, *My Well-beloved hath a Vineyard in a very fruitful Hill, and he fenced it,*
and

and gathered out the Stones thereof, and **Ser. I.**
 planted it with the choicest Vine, and
 built a Tower in the midst of it, and also
 made a Wine-press therein; and he look-
 ed, that it shou'd bring forth Grapes, and
 it brought forth wild Grapes. This is
 explain'd afterwards, For the Vineyard --- Ver. 7,
 of the Lord of Hosts is the House of
 Israel, and the Men of Judah his plea-
 sant Plant; and he looked for Judgment,
 but behold Oppression; for Righteousness,
 but behold a Cry. Hear the Judgment
 pronounced, And now, O Inhabitants of --- Ver. 3,
 Jerusalem, and Men of Judah, judge, I
 pray you, between me and my Vineyard.
 What could have been done more to my
 Vineyard, that I have not done in it?
 Wherefore when I look'd, that it should --- Ver. 4,
 bring forth Grapes, brought it forth wild
 Grapes? And now go to; I will tell you
 what I will do to my Vineyard; I will --- Ver. 5,
 take away the Hedge thereof, and it
 shall be eaten up, and break down the
 Wall thereof, and it shall be troden down,
 And I will lay it waste; it shall not be --- Ver. 6,
 pruned, nor digged, but there shall come
 up Briers and Thorns; I will also com-
 mand the Clouds, that they rain no Rain
 upon it. Having thus briefly dispatch'd
 the moral Sense of this Parabolical Acti-
 on

Vol. III. on of our *Lord*, it will be very easy
 for us to see,

III. What Use we are to make of it; what Instruction we may derive from it. For the slightest Reflexion we can make upon it, will teach us these Two Things.

First, That where God affords the Means of Grace, he expects the Fruit of it. And,

Secondly, That Unfruitfulness under the Means of Grace, is a dangerous State.

Our *Saviour's* coming to the Tree to seek Fruit, insinuates the one; and his blasting it by a Curse for its Barrenness, the other.

I will briefly inculcate each of 'em.

First then : Where GOD bestows his Favours, he does expect proper and suitable Returns : Where he does afford the Means of Grace, he expects the Fruit thereof. Were we thoroughly convinced of this, we shou'd be abundantly more sensible of our indispensable Obligation to Holiness and Virtue. For we shou'd see, That God lays too great a stress

a stress upon the Morality of our *Ser. L.*
 Actions, for Virtue and Vice to be
 Things indifferent; and that he has
 too great a Value and Consideration
 for us to be unconcern'd about what
 we do. And yet how easily may this
 Truth be made out? Does the Hus-
 bandman plough and sow without Ex-
 pectation of a Crop? Does he dig,
 and dung, and dress his Vineyard
 without any prospect of Fruit from it?
 And yet how often is God, in *Holy*
Writ, compar'd to an *Husbandman*?
 Can it become the Wisdom and Majesty
 of God, to contrive and labour, to bear
 the Expence of so many Mercies and so
 many Miracles, without any Design or
 Purpose? Can we think that God, who
 does not suffer the Abuse of Temporal
 and Corruptible Things to go un-
 punish'd, can be pleas'd with the
 Abuse of Spiritual and Heavenly Things?
 Can we think that he display'd the Light
 of his Gospel, only that a Rebellious
 and Obstinate World might close their
 Eyes against it? That he gave his
 Son, his *only begotten Son*, only that
 the *Jew* and *Gentile* might first shed
 his Blood, and the impious ungrateful
Christian might afterwards trample on
 it as an *unholy thing*? Or, that he
 bestows

Vol. III. bestows his Spirit, only that we may resist, and grieve, and quench it? Surely, no Man can chuse but see, that all this is to contradict and defeat the Design of God, and to receive his Grace in vain? Lastly, What is there in this Expectation of God, that is either unjust or unreasonable? Is it not fit, that he who has inestimable Benefits heap'd upon him, shou'd be thankful to his Great Benefactor? That he who enjoys the Light of Revelation, should walk by it? That he who is redeemed by the Blood of *Christ* from this Evil World, shou'd be no longer a Slave to it? And that he who is renew'd and assisted by the Spirit of God, shou'd overcome Temptations, and work Righteousness? The Sum of what I have said is this: If we consult Reason about the Matter before us, it will plainly tell us, That tho' our Sin cannot hurt God, nor our Righteousness profit him, yet a Holy God cannot but expect and require Holiness from us, and if we act consonant to the Mercies and Obligations he has conferr'd upon us, and to the Grace he communicates to us, we cannot but practise it?

And

And does not the *Scripture* say the *Ser. I.*
 same Thing? Does it not in a thou-
 sand Places assure us, that this is the
 great Design of GOD, that this is the
 Fruit he expects from us, and that with-
 out it we cannot in the least answer the
 End of GOD in our Creation and Re-
 demption? Need I put you in Mind
 how often our *Saviour* compares his
 Word to *Seed*, and his Hearers to *Mat. 13.*
Ground, which he pronounces Good or
 Bad, as it does, or does not bring forth
 Fruit? What need I call to your Re-
 membrance the *Parable of the Talents*? *---Ver. 29.*
 From which we learn, that 'twill not
 be enough for us, at the Day of Judg-
 ment, not to have mis-spent our Talents,
 we must improve and increase them, or
 else we are lost for ever. I will dwell
 upon this Matter no longer. The *Gos-*
pel every-where testifies, that this is the
 great End of all that GOD has done for
 us, namely, That *being made free from* *Rom. 6. 10.*
Sin, and become Servants to God, we
should have our Fruit unto Holiness, and
the end everlasting Life.

You see then what GOD expects, and
 how just and reasonable this Expectation
 is, I beseech you examine yourselves
 how well you answer it. You have the
 Word of GOD constantly preach'd to

C

you,

Vol. III. you : Do you bring forth the Fruit of it in your Lives? Or do you come hither to observe and censure the Gesture, the Language, the Delivery, the Learning of the *Preacher*? And so the powerful Speaker is to you, just what God, says the Prophet *Ezekiel*, was to the Jews, *And lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely Song of one that hath a pleasant Voice, and can play well on an Instrument; for they hear thy Words, and do them not.* You have the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper administred here Weekly: What Consolation, what Strength do you derive from it? Is your Love inflam'd, your Faith establish'd, your Vigilance quickned, and your Zeal increas'd by it? Or do you return from it cold and lifeless as you came; and repeat it, not because you feel any Satisfaction in it, or reap any Benefit from it; but only because you cannot decently avoid it, or easily shake off the Conscience of the Duty? You have here daily Prayers: Do you resort to them in that Number, and with that devout Thirst that bespeaks you to have a true Notion of the Honour and Dignity of Publick Worship? Our Hymns and Praises are Imitations of the *Halleluiah's* above; and our Liturgy is, in this

Ezek. 33.

32.

this respect, an imperfect Rudiment of Ser. I. that more perfect Worship which we shall one Day perform in the Choir of Heaven. Ah! how unfit is it then to come hither out of Form or Custom; and when we are here, to have our Thoughts wandring, or our Hearts unaffected? How much it imports us to examine ourselves concerning these Things, you will easily discern from the next Observation I made from the *Text*, which I am now to speak to:

Secondly, From Christ's cursing the Fig-tree for its Barrenness, upon which it immediately withered away; we cannot but infer, that Barrenness or Unfruitfulness, under the Means of Grace, is a dangerous, a desperate State. You cannot be ignorant of this, if you read the *Scriptures*. Those Words of our Lord cannot, but upon this Occasion, come into your Minds, *Behold, these three Years I come seeking Fruit on this Fig-tree, and find none: cut it down, why cumbereth it the Ground?* Luke 13.7: Hear again St. Paul, *For the Earth which drinketh in the Rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth Blessing from God: But that which beareth Thorns and Briers, is rejected, and*

Vol. III. is *nigh unto cursing, whose End is to be burned.* Ah! How soon may'st thou be harden'd into a Reprobate Sense? How soon may God withdraw his Spirit, and give thee up unto thy self? How soon may the Day of Grace set, and rise no more upon thee for ever? *This indeed is the acceptable Time, this is the Day of Salvation;* but if thou now hardenest thy Heart, how can'st thou tell how long it may last? Look, I beseech thee, about thee, and mark how Sinners fall on thy Right Hand and on thy Left, some in a miserable, and others in a doubtful State with respect to Eternity; some in the full Career of their Sins, others amidst the Purposes and Designs of a Future Repentance, or at best but in the Beginnings of it, and only upon the Borders of the *Kingdom of God.* How knowest thou how soon this may be thy Lot? What is the Ground of thy Presumption? With what vain Hope do'st thou flatter thy self? Do'st thou condemn the Justice and Omnipotence of God, a Holy, a Jealous God? Or do'st thou think his Goodness such, that he can never be
 2 Pet. 2. 4. *exasperated?* He that *spared not the Angels* when they *sinned*, will he spare thee, who do'st obstinately persist in Sin, in
 Defiance

Defiance of Light and Grace and Mercy? He that spared not his Chosen People, the Seed of *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, his Friends and Favourites; will he spare thee, who hast nothing of this Nature to pretend to? Alas! Alas! if thou knowest not that the Goodness of God should lead thee to Repentance, thy hardness and impenitent Heart does but treasure up unto thy self Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God. And surely, thou can'st not think that Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, the Loss of a Heaven, and the incurring a Hell, are trifling and inconsiderable Things, fit to be despis'd and slighted. No, No; if thou do'st not fear these Things, there can be but one Reason for it; thou art blinded and infatuated by the Lusts of the Body, and the Cares of the World; and hence it is that thou art not sensible of the Presence of a Holy GOD, nor thinkest of a Judgment to come: Thou art wholly taken up with the Present, and hast no time to think on a Future State: Thy Heart is so set upon, and so far engaged in the Things of this World, that thou can'st have no Notion of, nor Concern for

Ser. I.
~

Rom. 2.
4. 5.

Vol. III. those of Another. Ah! that thou
 ~~~~~ wouldst now awake out of this Le-  
 thargy, and shake off this Stupidity,  
 before the Time come when thou  
 wouldst give a Thousand Worlds, if  
 thou hadst them, for *one of the Days of*  
*the Son of Man*, and shalt not be able  
 to gain it! Remember the Words of  
 our Lord to the Jews, on a like Occa-  
 sion, not very unapplicable to us on  
 this, *Wo unto thee Chorazin, wo unto*  
*thee Bethsaida; for if the mighty Works*  
*which were done in you, had been done*  
*in Tyre and Sidon, they would have re-*  
*pented long ago in Sackcloth and Ashes.*  
*But I say unto you, It shall be more toler-*  
*able for Tyre and Sidon, at the Day of*  
*Judgment, than for you. And thou*  
*Capernaum, which art exalted unto*  
*Heaven, shalt be brought down to Hell:*  
*for if the mighty Works which have been*  
*done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it*  
*would have remain'd until this Day. But*  
*I say unto you, That it shall be more toler-*  
*able for the Land of Sodom, in the Day of*  
*Judgment, than for thee.*

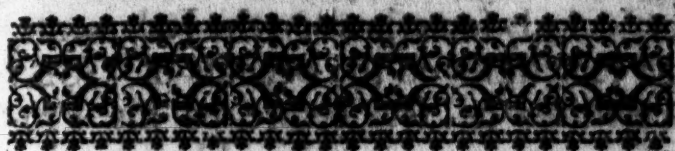
Luke 17.  
22.

Mat. 11.  
21, 22,  
23, 24.

The End of the First Sermon.

~~~~~

SERMON



SERMON II.

Man's Proneness to Sin.

[The First Sermon upon this Text.]

DEUT. xxix. 19.

*And it come to pass when he heareth the
the Words of this Curse, that he shall
bless himself in his Heart, saying, I
shall have Peace, tho' I walk in the
Imagination of mine Heart, to add
Drunkenness to Thrift.*



M OSES ever and anon is Vol. III.
laying before us the great
and wondrous Works of
GOD, that he may pos-
sess our Minds with a due
Sense of his Majesty and
Glory, of his Power and Greatness.
Nor does he content himself with do-
ing

Vol. III. ing this in general ; but he insists more particularly sometimes on the Judgments, and sometimes on the Benefits of GOD : Sometimes he sets before us his Promises, and sometimes his Threats, that he may one way or other work upon us, and prevail with us to obey GOD either through Hope or Fear, Love or Terror. But so prone are we to Sin, that neither the Benefits nor Chastisements, the Mercies nor Judgments, the Promises nor Threats of GOD have that Influence upon us which they should : We frustrate the Virtue and Efficacy of the one, by Forgetfulness or Arrogance ; of the other, by Confidence and Presumption ; and of both, by Infidelity. *Moses* therefore is very solicitous and industrious to prevent or root out these corrupt and wicked Dispositions, which defeat the Force of all the Motives and Arguments for Obedience, which can be deriv'd from the Nature or Providence of GOD.

Thus *Deut. 8.* he cautions the *Jews* against Vanity and Arrogance in the Day of their Prosperity ; against Forgetfulness of GOD, and assuming too much to themselves. *Beware,* says he, *that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his Commandments, and his*
Judgments,

Judgments, and his Statutes, which Ser. II. I command thee this Day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly Houses, and dwelt therein, and when thy Herds and thy Flocks multiply, and thy Silver and thy Gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied, then thine Heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, — And thou say in thine Heart, my Power and the Might of my Hand hath gotten me this Wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee Power to get Wealth.

And in this Chapter, he points out the other Shelf on which we are apt to wreck and split our Obedience, warning the Israelites not to flatter themselves with the Hopes of Impunity in their Sins, nor to presume groundlessly on GOD's Goodness, in Opposition to his Holiness and Justice; for GOD would certainly be as severe as his Threats, and actually accomplish on the Presumptuous Sinner all the Curses which he denounced against him in his Covenant. Beware, says he, lest there should be among you a Root that beareth Gall and Wormwood, and it come to pass when he heareth the Words of this Curse, that

Vol. III. *that he bless himself in his Heart, saying, I shall have Peace, tho' I walk in the Imagination of mine Heart, to add Drunkenness to Thirst. And in the Verse following, he gives us the plain Reason of this Caution, The Lord will not spare him, but then the Anger of the Lord, and his Jealousy shall smoke against that Man, and all the Curses that are written in this Book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his Name from under Heaven.*

Thus I have set the Design of the Text in a clear Light before you: And it will easily appear how proper a Subject this is for our Meditation, if we consider what Effect the Mercies and Judgments of God have had upon us; whether they have rais'd in us either Gratitude or Fear, and thereby produced Repentance and Obedience; or whether we have forgot the Mercies of God, and harden'd ourselves against his Judgments and his Threats, and so persist in our Sins through Arrogance, Presumption, and Infidelity.

From the Words thus explain'd, I shall discourse of Three Things.

I. That we are very prone to Sin.

This

This is intimated by two Expressions Ser. II. in my *Text*, which contain a Description of Sin. 1. It is called *the Inclination of the Heart*, which imports the Bent and Tendency of the Heart of Man towards Sin. 2. It is said to be an *adding Drunkenness to Thrift*, which suggests to us, that our Inclinations to Sin are almost as natural to us as the Appetites of the Body, or at least, that we easily pass into Excess and Irregularities.

The next Thing I shall insist on from the *Text*, is,

II. That we ought often to meditate on the Threats of God denounced against Sin, as the most effectual way to restrain ourselves from it.

This is imply'd both in the *Text* and the whole *Chapter*.

III. That is is a most foolish and absurd Thing, to flatter ourselves with the Hopes of Impunity, while we persist in Sin, in defiance of the Threats of God.

This it is against which the *Text* cautions us, lest when we *hear the Words of this Curse*, instead of being aw'd and restrained by them, we should
bless

Vol. III. *bles* ourselves in our Hearts, and promise ourselves Peace, tho' we walk in the Imagination of our Hearts, to add Drunkenness to Thirst.

chap. 19.
ver. 19, 20.

1. That we are very prone to Sin. This is the Character given Human Nature in Job, *Behold he putteth no Trust in his Saints; yea, the Heavens are not clean in his sight. How much more abominable and filthy is Man, which drinketh Iniquity like Water?* Some few indeed there are, who ascribe greater Light and Strength to Man than he is really possess'd of, but in the general, all acknowledge this to be a Truth, tho' very few lay it to Heart as they should. I shall therefore,

1st, Imprint it a little deeper on your Minds: And then,

2^{dly}, Make some practical Reflexions upon it.

1st, To convince you more fully how prone we are to Sin, I must beseech you to consider,

1. What you feel and experience in your selves.

2. The Prevalence of Sin throughout the World.

3. The Unwillingness of Man to part with it, and renounce it, even when he

is convinced that he ought to do *ser. II*
so.

1. Would every Man look into his own Bosom, observe the Motions of his own Heart; would he examine his own Actions, especially those wherein he acts most freely, and without Restraint, I mean those of his Retirement and Privacy, he would soon find what a Bias Nature and Custom have fix'd upon his Affections, and with what Precipitation he is hurried on to such Things as are a Contradiction to his Reason and his Religion, to his Profession and Reputation. No Man can attend ever so little to himself, but he must be too sadly sensible, that there is a *Law* in his *Members*, warring against the *Law* of his *Mind*; that his Inclination and Reason, his Lust, Humour, and Fancy, and his Religion, do frequently clash and contend with one another. The one invites to Pleasure, the other to Self-denial; the one to Ease, the other to Labour. In a word, no Man can know himself and not discern how apt he is to love this World, and forget another; how easy it is to him to omit or transgress his Duty, and how hard to live up to it. The one is to live by Faith, the other by Sense; the one is to

Rom. 7.
23.

Vol. III. to gratify his Inclinations, the other is to subdue and master them; and hence it is, that the *Scripture* so constantly teaches, that we cannot please God, unless we be Regenerated and led by his Spirit, unless we put off the old Man, and put on the New, i. e. plainly, unless we be rais'd above the State of Nature, and chang'd into new Creatures by the Light and Power of the Word and Spirit of God.

John 3. 3.
Eph. 4. 22.
Rom. 6. 6.

2. The Progress and Prevalence of Sin in the World, is another plain Proof of our Propension to it. I will not go so far back as the *Ante-diluvian*, *Gentile*, or *Jewish* World, to shew you how Wickedness has over-run every Age: Alas! the Christian World furnishes us with too notorious Instances of the Increase and Success of Wickedness in all Places. Whence can this now come to pass? Reason condemns it, Human Laws forbid and restrain it, and generally the Natural Consequences of it are sufficient to deter any Rational Man from it. Must not this plainly argue, that there is a Root of Bitterness in us, and that our Inclinations are strongly bent upon that which is Evil? But alas! What talk I of the Natural Fruit of Sin in this Life, of Human Laws,

Laws, and the Light of Nature? **Ser. II.**
 These are, comparatively speaking, the
 weakest Arguments against Sin that we
 have. What has not a Holy and Good
 God done, to prevent, restrain, or ex-
 tirpate Sin in the World? What Light
 has he not afforded us? What Strength
 is he not ready to assist us with?
 What Obligations has he not laid
 upon us? And what Motives has he
 not set before us? What Light can
 be sufficient, if the Revelation of
 the *Gospel* be not? What Evidence can
 be Ground enough for Faith, if that
 of the *Gospel* be not? What Reward
 can engage us, if a Heaven cannot?
 Or what Punishment can deter us,
 if a Hell cannot? Do we expect
 any greater Instance of Love and
 Goodness, than that illustrious one
 of the Redemption of the World by
 the *Son of God*? Can we ever hope
 for a more powerful Aid than that of
 the *Holy Ghost*? Or can any Pleasure
 vie with that of a good Conscience
 flowing from a good Life, and the
 Testimony of the *Spirit*? And yet
 all this we break through, forget, and
 slight, to gratify some Vicious and
 Corrupt Affection. How violent, how
 obstinate must our Distemper be, when
 such Remedies as these cannot give a
 Check

Vol. III. Check to it? What more powerful
 Methods can Infinite Wisdom and Good-
 ness find out, to reform and reclaim
 a Wicked World, and to propagate
 Holiness in it? Well may God ap-
 peal to us, as He once did to *Israel*,
 Isa. 5. 3, 4. *And now, Inhabitants of Jerusalem, and*
Men of Judah, judge, I pray you, be-
twixt me and my Vineyard, what could
have been done more to my Vineyard,
that I have not done in it?

3. Our Backwardness and Unwilling-
 ness to part with Sin, shews our Fond-
 ness for it. How hard, sometimes, is it
 to convince us, that what we do is
 sinful, even when 'tis clear to others?
 What Varnish and false Colours do we
 put upon our Actions, and how plau-
 sibly do we plead for a favourite Lust,
 as if we could impose not only on the
 World, but on GOD too, as easily as
 on our Selves? When we are con-
 vinced, that the Course we are in is
 Sinful, ah! how unwillingly do we re-
 nounce it, and how hard do we find it
 to come to a thorough Change, and
 sincere Reformation? How often do
 we procrastinate and delay Repentance,
 and content ourselves with purposing
 to be better, instead of being so?
 How long do we live upon the very
 Borders of Sin, and tho' we do not
 practise

practise what we resolv'd against, yet **Set II.**
 we approach so near it, that our
 Minds are very much weaken'd and
 depress'd? How slight, commonly, are
 the Resolutions which we make against
 Sin, and how easily do we relapse into
 it? How difficult do we find it to be
 always upon our Guard; or to arrive
 at such a state of Spiritual Pleasure,
 Strength and Purity, as may make us
 look with Disdain and Disgust upon
 Temptations? In short, we have a
 natural Appetite for Pleasure, and an
 Aversion for Pain; and what is Na-
 tural, easily passes into sinful; *Thirst*
 into *Drunkenness*; and a good Esteem
 for the World, into Covetousness and
 Ambition. Thus far of the First Thing
 propos'd, the Propension Man has to
 Sin. I come now, in some Practical Re-
 flexions on what I have said, to shew
 the Influence this Consideration ought
 to have upon us.

1. This ought to make us earnestly
 desire a Better State.

2. This ought to make us walk cir-
 cumspectly and watchfully.

3. This shews us what an inestimable
 Value we are to set upon the Salvation
 procur'd by Christ.

-4D

4. This

Vol. III. 4. This convinces us what Need we stand in of Divine Assistance, and how importunate we ought to be for it.

1. This ought to make us earnestly desire a better State. This belongs, in the first Place, to the Unregenerate, in whom Propensions to Sin are unsubdued, unmortified. Would ~~but~~ ^{if} a One but consider what Sin was, and what were the dreadful Effects of it, he would necessarily look upon his Inclinations to it, as a Disease or Distemper, the most destructive and dangerous that can be, he would groan under the Evil and Trouble of it, and earnestly desire to be delivered from it; *O wretched Man that I am, who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death! i. e.* When I consider Sin, either what it is in it self, or in its Consequences, it cannot but fill me with the most sensible Trouble and Apprehension, to find my self so prone to it. Sin is the defacing the Divine Image, 'tis the Depravation of all the Powers and Faculties of my Soul, 'tis Darkness and Error, 'tis Servitude and Bondage, 'tis Deformity and Leprosy, 'tis Enmity with GOD, and fills my Mind with Vexation and Shame, with Distraction and Tumult, and with Ominous Guilty Fears. And all this is but the

Rom. 7.

24.

the beginning of Evils; for Sin makes me justly liable to the Wrath of God: **Ser. II.**
And ah! who can comprehend what this one thing implies, for as his Power is, so is his Wrath? *O wretched Man that I am!* who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death? Who will mortify in me my corrupt Affections, and restore the Divine Image in me? Who will cure me of this dangerous Distemper in my Nature? Who will change this unhappy State I am in, into one of Light and Liberty, of Strength and Purity? Who will disperse the Clouds and Terrors that hang over me? Who will deliver me from the Wrath to come? These are the Reflexions which every unconverted Person ought to make upon the Truth I have been insisting on, and which he cannot but feel, our Propension to Sin.

Nor are the best Men and the most perfect Christians so free from some Degrees of this Propension, as that They too should not desire a better State. The Best, while they are in the Body, have something to watch over, and to struggle with: Their Propensions are not so rooted out, nor so entirely mortified, but that they often give them a Disturbance, and attempt, tho' unsuccessful,

D 2

Vol. III. cessfully, to seduce them from their Duty : Therefore even These have Reason to long for a better State, even that State wherein not only *Mortality shall be swallowed up of Life*, but our irregular Affections shall be swallowed up of Divine Love, and the Defects and Disorders of our Nature, of Perfection and Glory. To this therefore, I may accomodate those Words of St. Paul, *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the First-fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the Adoption, to wit, the Redemption of our Body.*

2 Cor. 5.
4.

Rom. 8.
23.

2. We ought to walk circumspectly : For since Sin is the greatest of Evils, and brings upon us unspeakable Misery ; and since we are so much inclin'd to it ; what Care, what Caution can be too great to guard ourselves against it ? How diligently ought we to endeavour to know ourselves, that being sensible where our Weakness lies, what *the Sin is which doth so easily beset us*, and what the Temptations which are most likely to prevail against us, we may effectually provide against our Danger ? How watchful ought we to be over all the Motions of our Heart ; since we are convinced, that the natural Tendencies

Heb. 12 .11.

dencies of it are too generally toward Ser. I.
 Sin and Death? Thus Solomon advises, *Keep thy Heart with all Diligence, for* Prov. 4.
out of it are the Issues of Life. Not 23.
 are there any Exhortations in Scrip-
 ture more frequent than those which
 press us to Vigilance, to Fear, to a di-
 ligent Enquiry into ourselves, and that
 on these Grounds; because we are
 weak, our Hearts deceitful, Tempta-
 tions many, and many the Snares a-
 mongst which we walk; because GOD
 is Holy and Impartial, and we are to
 give an Account of our Actions in the
 Great Day of Judgment, and the Sentence
 of that Day is irreversibile, and the Hap-
 piness and Misery of Eternity determin'd
 by it. Thus, *Stand in awe and sin not:* Psal. 4. 4.
commune with your own Heart upon your
Bed, and be still. Be sober, be vigilant; 1 Pet. 5.
because your Adversary the Devil, as a 8.
roaring Lion, walketh about, seeking whom
he may devour. And again, If ye call — 1. 17.
on the Father, who without respect of
Persons judgeth according to every Man's
Work, pass the Time of your sojourning
here in Fear. I'll add but one Text
more, See then that ye walk circumspect- Eph. 5. 15.
ly, not as Fools, but as Wise, redeeming
the time, because the Days are evil.
 These Words suggest two Things to us.

Vol. III. 1st, That Security in the midst of Danger, Carelessness and Confidence in a State of Sin, is the grossest Folly that can be. 2dly, That the Number of Sinners is so far from being an Encouragement to Sin, that it is what ought to deter us from it. The more fashionable Sin is, the more like are we to be taken with it; the more Epidemical the Distemper is, so much the more infectious; and the more Sin prevails in any Nation or People, the nearer they are to Ruin; for 'tis Time for G O D to execute Judgment, when his Threats are slighted, and his Patience and Forbearance does but increase the Confidence of Sinners.

3. From our Propension to Sin, we learn what an unspeakable Blessing the Coming of our Lord *Jesus* Christ into the World was. 'Tis the true Sense of our Wants, that teaches us the Value of Divine Benefits; the true Sense of our Danger, that teaches us how to estimate our Deliverance. *Mat. 1. 21.* *Thou shalt call his Name Jesus, (said the Angel) for he shall save his People from their Sins, i. e. from the Power and from the Guilt of them.* How great, how inestimable a Deliverance was this? What need was there of the Light of the Gospel, when the whole World lay in *Egyptian*

Egyptian Darknes? What need was there of a mighty Ransom, when *the whole World lay in Wickedness*? What Power could rescue Man from the Dominion of Sin, or what Blood could atone for it but that of *Christ*? When Idolatry and Vice were not only establish'd upon a stupid Ignorance, but were augmented and strengthened by Custom and Tradition, by Example and Law; nay, all sorts of Looseness and Cruelty, not only legitimated by an universal Concurrence, but as it were hallow'd and consecrated into Religion, by the Arts and Illusions and Lying Wonders of wicked Spirits; what but a Light from Heaven could dispel this Darknes? What but a plain and clear Revelation could disengage Men from inveterate Prejudices and Prepossessions? What but the Authority of God could confront the Authority of Tradition, Example, and Law? What but true Miracles could baffle false ones? And what but the Might and Power of a Divine Spirit could rescue Nature, thus weak, thus sunk and degenerate, thus imbroll'd and entangled? How then are we to bless God for the Salvation effected by his Son? And let every one of us think, that whatever the Difference

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between

Ser. II.
John 3.
19.

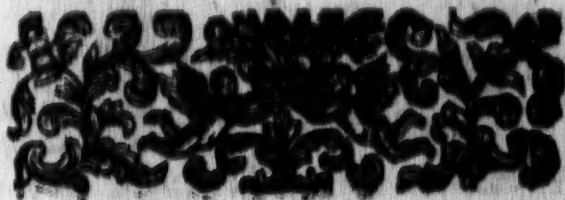
Vol. III. between the State of the *Gentiles* formerly, and ours at this Day, is, 'tis wholly owing to *Christ's* coming into the World. If he had not come, the World had at least been as bad now as it was then, or 'tis it could be, as much worse as 'tis older.

Lastly, Since we are so prone to Sin, What reason have we to be Humble, to Distrust our selves, to be Importunate for the Grace of God, and to Depend upon him? What reason have we to glory only in *Christ*, in the Power of his Word, and in the Might of his Spirit? If we look up to God continually, and depend upon him, we shall continually derive Light and Strength from him: If we Pray continually, we shall thrive and flourish more and more, and the meaner and lower we are in our own Eyes, the more shall we be exalted and enriched by God. And how natural is it, in our Condition, to apply our selves to God? Who can look upon himself as tied and bound in the Chains of Sin, and not beg earnestly, O let the Pitifulness of thy Mercy loose me? Who can be sensible of his own Weakness, and not pray, that God would strengthen him with Might, by his Spirit, in the inner Man? Who can call

Eph. 3. 16.

call to Mind how shallow his Capacity, Ser. II. how dim and short-sighted his Understanding is, and not beg of God to make the Way plain before his Face, and send forth his Light and his Truth, that they may preserve him? Who can reflect upon the Temptations of the World, the Deceitfulness of his Heart, and the Natural Bent of his Inclinations, and not pray heartily, that God would preserve him by his Power through Faith unto Salvation. 1 Pet. i. 9. In a word, If we have any true Sense of our Insufficiency or our Danger, we can never, surely, be so far wanting to our selves, as not to address frequently and fervently to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in time of need. Heb. 4. 16.

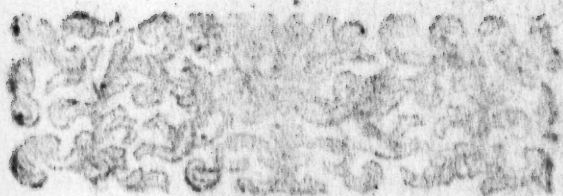
The End of the Second Sermon,



SERMON

will remind how hollow his capacity, how
how thin and short-sighted his understanding
standing is, and not beg of God to
make the Way plain before his feet,
and lead forth his light and his
Truth, that they may preserve him?
Who can rest upon the Temptations
of the World, the Deceitfulness of his
Heart, and the Malice of his
Inclinations, and not grieve heavily,
that God would preserve him by his
Power, always faint and fainting?
Now, in a word, let us have our
Sins of our infirmity, or our
yet, we can never truly be so
wanting to our lives, as not to address
frequently and fervently to the Father
of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy
and God's Grace to help in time
of need.

The End of the Second Sermon.



SERMON

SERMON III.

Of Religious Fear.

[The Second Sermon upon this Text.]

DEU T. xxix. 19.

And it come to pass when he heareth the the Words of this Curse, that he bless himself in his Heart, saying, I shall have Peace, tho' I walk in the Imagination of mine Heart, to add Drunkenness to Thirst.



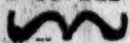
FROM these Words I observe'd Three Things. Vol. III.

I. That we are very prone to Sin.

Hence is Sin call'd here *the Imagination of the Heart*, and describ'd by adding *Drunkenness to Thirst*.

II. That

Vol. III.



II. That we ought often to meditate on the Threats of GOD against Sin, as the best Means to restrain our selves from it.

'Tis for this Reason that *Moses* and the *Prophets* do so frequently and pathetically lay before us the dreadful Consequences of Sin; and particularly this was the thing which *Moses* had in his Eye, in this *Chapter*, and especially in my *Text* and the *Verses* following.

III. That it is absurd and irrational to persist in Sin, in hope of Impunity.

This is the Folly and Madness which the *Text* especially warns us of.

I have treated already on the *First* of these Doctrines, and will now proceed to the *Second*,

III. 107



II. That we ought to meditate on the Threats of GOD against Sin, as the best Means to restrain our selves from it.

'Tis with this View that *Moses* adds, ver. 20. that terrible Declaration which GOD makes against a Sinner, who, in my *Text*, flatters himself with Impunity, while

while he persists in his Sin; *The Lord* Ser. III. will not spare him: but then the Anger of the Lord and his Jealousy shall smoke against that Man, and all the Curses that are written in this Book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his Name from under Heaven. The Consequences of Sin, which the Scripture sets before us, are such as One would think it were impossible for us ever to put a Sense of 'em out of our Minds. Sin brings down upon us Judgments of all sorts, Publick, and Private, National and Personal, Temporal and Eternal, upon our Selves and our Relations, our Children and Posterity, upon our Bodies and Minds, upon our Fortunes and Reputations. In short, the Evils and Calamities which punish Sin, are so many and so terrible, that God may well be said to have *hedge'd* in our Way with Briars and Thorns; we cannot deviate from the Path of Virtue, but we are entangled in Mischiefs, and pierced with Troubles and Afflictions. On this Account, God compares a Sinner to a Horse rushing into the Battle; to intimate to us how insensible the wretched Man is of his Danger and Calamity, and how blindly and precipitately he presses forward on the Points

Hos. 2. 6.

Jer. 8. 6.

Vol. III. Points of Pikes and Swords, on Wounds and Death; so that a Man may almost reverse that Sentence of our *Lord*, and apply to *Hell*, what he says of *Heaven*,
 Mat. II. 12. *The Kingdom of Darkness suffers Violence, and the Violent take it by force*; so many Evils does the Sinner break thorough, that he may gain Damnation.

Examine this a little farther: What is it that robs us of the Favour of God and the Protection of his Providence? What is it that imbroils the World in Wars and Contentions? Is it not Sin? Is it not our irregular Lusts and ungovernable Passions? What is it that blasts our Reputation and embitters our Enjoyments? What is it that divides, and disaffects, and alienates from one another the most intimate Friends and dearest Relations? Is it not our Sin, Peevishness, Selfishness, Pride, Willfulness, Falshood, or Ingratitude? What is it that fills our Minds with Discontent, Despondency, Melancholy, Guilty Fears and Terrors? Is it not our acting directly repugnant to our Reason? Is it not our Rebellion against God, our Violation of our Baptismal Covenant, and our resisting the richest Means and the highest Obligations?

Nor

Nor has Sin a pernicious Influence **Ser. III.**
 upon our Minds only, but sometimes
 upon our Bodies too. 'Tis true, we de-
 rive from *Adam* corruptible Bodies:
 But I do not doubt, if we should examine
 this Matter strictly, but we shall find
 that the far greater Part of those Pains
 and Distempers which infect the Body,
 which consume the Strength, and dis-
 figure the Beauty of it, are owing to our
 Vices. And yet, after all this, there is
 still something worse behind, *viz.* Death
 and Judgment.

I. Death. 'Tis true, that *Adam* and
Eve, by their Fall, intail'd Death upon
 their Posterity; so that we must all have **Rom. 5.**
 died, even tho' we had not sin'd, un-
 less God, by a Prerogative Grace,
 should have exempted any one of us, **Gen. 5: 24.**
 as he did *Enoch* and *Elijah*, from the **2 Kings 2.**
 Sentence pass'd upon all Mankind in
Adam, *Dust thou art, and unto Dust* **Gen. 3: 19.**
shalt thou return. But then 'tis as true,
 that actual Sin does shorten Life, and
 invenom and enrage Death. 'Tis Guilt
 that is *the Sting of Death*; 'tis Guilt **1 Cor. 15.**
 that adds the Torments of the Mind to **56.**
 the Pains and Sufferings of the Body;
 'tis Guilt that bereaves us of all Support,
 and makes the Prospect beyond Death
 look infinitely more black and dreadful
 than

Vol. III. than Death it self. *The Wicked is driven away in his Wickedness; but the Righteous hath Hope in his Death.*

Prov. 14. 32.

2. Judgment. This is an Evil that surpasses Death, as much as real Sufferings do the Fears of them, or a present Evil a distant one. In Judgment, every thing is inconceivably dreadful to the Sinner; the terrible Majesty of God, the Rage of a despairing Conscience, the bringing to open Light all our Works of Darknes, and all those vile Motives which we conceal'd or disguis'd, the Irreversibleness of the Sentence, the Intolerableness and Endlessness of the Punishment, what can move and affect the Mind of Man, if these Things can't? What can possess it with Fear and Caution, if this cannot? No doubt on't, if we did reflect on these Consequences of Sin as we should, this would have a very happy Influence upon us; it would teach us to form a true Estimate both of Sin, and the Temptations to it; it would make us Wise and Serious, Watchful, Circumspect and Cautious; we should look upon Sin as unquestionably the greatest of Evils; upon the Pleasures of Sense or Fancy, when they tempt us to it, as the most pernicious Poison, as the most fatal and destructive Snares and Cheats;

Cheats: And we should look upon the Ser. III. Troubles and Evils, the Travail and Self-denial which attend Vertue, as the Means of our Glory and our Happiness, and being sensible of our own Frailty, and the Dangers to which we are daily expos'd, we should be always upon our guard, we should be always arm'd and fortified, and always looking up to Heaven for Protection and Assistance. To act thus, were indeed to answer the Design of God's Threats against Sin, it were to comply with the Advice and Exhortation of the Scripture, to *pass the time of our sojourning here in Fear, to walk circumspectly, not as Fools, but as Wise*: And happy must I call those that do so: *Happy is the Man that feareth always.* Pee. 1. 74
Eph. 5. 15.
Prov. 10. 14.

Now to promote this your Happiness, I will shew you,

First, What we are to do, that the Evils with which God threatens Sin, may raise in us a Religious Fear.

Secondly, How we are to exercise this Fear when 'tis rais'd in us.

First, What we are to do, that the Evils with which God threatens Sin, may raise in us a Religious Fear. Here

E

I will

Vol. III. I will recommend to you these Three Things.

I. Disengage yourselves from all these Things, as much as in you lies, which either prevent your Meditation, or render it useless. You must endeavour to bring your Minds into a fit Disposition for Recollection and Meditation; you must not withdraw your Bodies only, but your Minds too, as far as you can, from the Pleasures and the Cares of Life, and when you have done so, then let every one examine himself thus: Do I really believe a God, and a Judgment to come? Do I believe that God is a just and holy God, and that he is an irreconcilable Enemy to Sin? Have I entertain'd right Notions of Sin, and Death, and Judgment? Have I weigh'd well what Provocation there is in Sin? Have I seriously and thoroughly consider'd what it is to Die, to be Judg'd, to be Damned? Or have I *deceiv'd my self with vain Words*, and thereby defeated the Efficacy of God's Threats? It is too too common, that Unbelief, or at least some Degrees of it, Prosumption, Procrastination, or Carelessness and Security, choke the Word, or render it unprofitable. We often say we Believe, when we have never examin'd the Proofs
and

and Evidences of the Truth; and these **Ser. III.**
 fore we are not properly convinced and 
 persuaded, but take Things upon Trust
 and by Tradition. This is that Belief
 of the Gospel which has no Root; and **Luke 9.**
 neither the Threats nor Promises of
 God, thus superficially entertain'd, will
 ever bring forth much Fruit. Some-
 times we presume upon Mercy, that
 God will not punish us, or that his
 Punishment will not be such as 'tis re-
 veal'd: Sometimes we propose to our-
 selves to Repent hereafter, and some-
 times we content ourselves with a very
 slight, imperfect, and maim'd Repentance.
 By these Ways we fool and cheat our
 Consciences, and prevent that Opera-
 tion which the Threats of God should
 have upon us, and certainly would,
 if we did not thus impose upon our-
 selves.

2. When we set our selves to meditate
 upon the dreadful Effects of Sin, upon
 Temporal Evils, *Death, Judgment, and*
Hell, let us not give over our Medita-
 tion 'till it has mov'd and affected us,
 'till it has imprinted in our Hearts a wise
 and holy Fear: Let us labour after the
 liveliest, clearest, and fullest Notion of
 these Things we can: Let us look upon
 Death and Judgment, not as Things re-

Vol. III. mote and distant, but just at the Door,  and let us consider how we shall be able to appear before an angry God, how we shall be able to dwell with everlasting Burnings. And if at any time we meditate on the pernicious Consequences of Sin in this Life, let us remember, that tho' we have not yet felt the Vengeance of God for our Sins, yet we have deserv'd it, and who knows but that it may light upon us the next Day? There is scarce a Day passes us, wherein we do not hear or see the Misery which Vice brings upon one or other, and sometimes upon whole Families, Cities, and Nations; and how long, think we, shall we escape if we do not repent? When you are upon this Subject, do not represent to yourselves this kind of ill Consequences of Sin by halves, but remember, that the Anguish of the Mind is commonly joined with the Pain of the Body; and an inward Shame and Fear, with outward Misfortunes and Calamities. We shall find ourselves deserted of all our Friends and Acquaintance, and deprived of all that Respect and Regard we us'd to meet with Abroad, as soon as our God has once forsaken us, and his swift Punishments begun to overtake us. If we thus dwell long upon these

these terrible Subjects, if we enter deep Ser. III. into them, if we survey with some Care and Exactness all the miserable Effects of our Sins, there's no doubt but, the Grace of God assisting our Mediation, we shall reap great Advantages from it: But slight and transient Reflexions leave behind them very slight and transient Effects.

3. You must repeat this Exercise often. We are very frail and very forgetful, we soon suffer the most important Truths to slip out of our Minds; our Concern for External Things does soon abate, and our good Purposes and Resolutions grow insensibly weaker and weaker, 'till they come to nothing. Add to this now, that Temptations are many, that we are every-where and almost at all Times attack'd by them, and then you'll soon be convinced how necessary it is, that we shou'd often repeat this kind of Meditation; that we shou'd refresh our Notions of the Evils of Sin, and preserve a wise and holy Fear strong and lively in us.

Thus I have given you, briefly, Directions how to raise in you a Religious Fear, by meditating on the terrible Evils which attend Sin. To which I'll only add, That we ought never to

E 3

forget

Vol. III. forget that we are continually in the Presence, and under the Eye of a holy God; that he who is the Judge, is the Witness too of all our Actions; and that our Sin can be no more conceal'd from his Sight, then defended or excus'd by those trifling Pretences with which we too often deceive ourselves. 'Tis true, 'tis too hard for human Understanding to comprehend the manner how God is every-where present; but both Reason and Revelation must convince us that he is so. He that is infinite fills all Things; he who Created and still Upholds all Things, must possess a Power and Knowledge that can

Acts 17. 28. have no Bounds. In him we live, and
Ps. 94. 9. move, and have our Being. He that
planted the Ear, shall he not hear? He
that formed the Eye, shall he not see?

If we would thus meditate on the Threats of God, they would certainly have a blessed Influence upon us; they would prevail with every Sinner to break off his Sin; and keep him who has already done so, from falling back into it. A Religious Fear would guard and secure us against Temptations; and mortifie all our unruly Appetites; it would keep us at a Distance, even from the Beginnings of Sin, and not suffer us to entertain

entertain ourselves with any thing that carries Danger and Temptation in it. Certainly were we always possess'd with a due Sense of the Divine Presence, we could not but serve the Lord with Fear, and rejoyce with Trembling. If we often thought of Death, we could be no longer able to indulge the Pride and Vanity of Life; we could no more sin presumptuously if a Judgment to come were always in our Thoughts, than we could if the Flames of Hell did now and then flash in our Eyes. A firm Faith, if it be but well digested by frequent and serious Meditation, will operate as effectually, tho' not with the same Emotion of Blood and Spirits, as any terrible Objects of Sense can do; they do not indeed wound the Imagination so forceably, but they sink deep into the Understanding, and penetrate the Heart. For this Reason undoubtedly 'twas that Solomon tells us, *It is better to go to the House of Mourning, than to go to the House of Feasting.* For this Cause 'twas undoubtedly, that our Saviour and his Apostles exhorted all Men to have their Loins girded about, and their Lights burning; to watch always; to wait for Jesus from Heaven, to pass the time of their sojourning here in Fear.

Ps. 2. 11.

Ecclef. 7.

2.

Luke 12.

35.

--- 21. 36.

1 Thes. 1.

10.

1 Pet. 1. 17.

Vol. III.

I come now, *Secondly*, to speak a few Words of the Exercise of Religious Fear, or the Use we are to make of it. Here I observe,

1. That this Fear becomes all sorts of Christians. 'Tis as well suited to preserve a good Man from falling into Sin, as it is a Motive to an ill Man to break off his Sin. To be afraid to commit Sin, because it provokes God and brings down Vengeance on the Sinner, is at all Times, and in all States, wise and reasonable. 'Tis a Virtue, which the Strong as well as the Weak, the Perfect as well as the Beginner, ought ever to practise; therefore St. Peter tells us, that we ought to *pass the time of our sojourning here in Fear*; Solomon pronounces him *Happy that feareth always*; and St. Paul exhorts all, that they should *not be high-minded, but fear*. They are therefore grossly mistaken, who condemn the Obedience proceeding from the fear of Punishment, as Servile; and that which proceeds from the hope of a Reward, as Mercenary. This is a Doctrine, which whilst it contends for Perfection, digs up the very Foundations of all Religion; 'tis a flat Contradiction to the Frame and Contexture of human

1 Pet. I. 17.

Prov. 28.

14.

Rom. II.

20.

human Nature, and reflects rudely on *Sen. III.* the Wisdom of God; for Divine Laws, as well as Human have their Sanctions and Establishments in Rewards and Punishments. And no wonder, for Self-Love is the first and most natural Principle in Man; and while he is weak and indigent, and loves himself, 'tis impossible but that he should fear Evil, and desire Good; 'tis for an All-sufficient Being, who is not liable to Evil, or capable of more Good, to delight in doing Good for its own sake; and when we shall come to that Height, when we shall come to be so closely united to God, that our Perfection and our Happiness shall be the greatest we are capable of, and ever immutably the same; then shall we be capable of no other Passion but Admiration, Joy, and Love. But in the mean time we must be content to be govern'd by the humble Affections of Hope and Fear.

2. Begin the Day with possessing your Soul with this Fear; recollect your self, and bethink you that Life is a State of Trial, that the Temptations of it are many, that we are weak and frail Creatures, that we walk before a Holy and Omnipresent God, that we are hastning towards Death (in which nothing

Vol. III. nothing can comfort us but the Conscience of a well-spent Life; and towards Judgment, when we must give Account to an All-seeing God of all that we have done in the Body. And if you have Time, dwell a-while particularly on the remediless and inexpressible Misery of those who live and die in their Sins. Such Thoughts as these will beget in you a Concern and Solitude to please God, to escape the Wrath to come, and secure a blessed Eternity. Such Thoughts as these will beget in you that Religious Fear I am talking of, and make you pass the following Day soberly and circumspectly.

3. In an Hour of Trial, i. e. when either Corruption from within, or a Temptation from without assaults us; when we grow Careless and Forgetful, Gay and Jolly; when we find any Inclination to Folly kindle in us; when the Vigour of our Mind abates; when we find ourselves lazy, averse to Labour and Duty, and unwilling to deny ourselves; or when Respect, Friendship, and Pleasure begin to steal upon us, allure and engage our Minds, or Business to distract and withdraw us from our Religious Performances and Conversation with God; Then it is time to call
this

this Religious Fear to our Aid; Then it is time to start back, and make a stand to recollect our selves, and to reflect, in as lively a manner as we can, upon the Presence of God, upon Death and Judgment. Thus we are to encounter the very Beginnings of Sin, and give a Check to them; thus we are to suppress corrupt Inclinations, and reject the first Solicitation of Temptation, lest Sin advance gradually, and we yield insensibly, and our Hearts be engaged, before we are aware, too far to retreat. Thus we are to carry our selves, with respect to those Things, which infect and defile the Mind by little and little, and do not in the first Appearance import direct Wickedness; but rather make way for it by instilling into us too great a Fondness for Things of the World, and the Body, by rendering us careless and thoughtless, sluggish and backward to Duty; and consequently, much more weak, and much more dispos'd to what is ill. But if the Thing that presents it self be direct Sin and Wickedness, if the Temptation, as it be great and sudden, then our Fear ought to be so too; then ought we to cry out immediately with Joseph, *How can I do this great Wickedness, and sin against God?* Now ought

Vol. III. ought we immediately to think, This is that which brings upon me the Wrath of God, the Misery of this Life, and of that which is to come; This is that which the Scripture warns me to shun as a Snare and a Pit, and to fly from as the Teeth of a Serpent. O let me not deceive my self with vain Words. Lord save me, or else I perish.

Prov. 22.

14.

Psal. 58.4.

The End of the Third Sermon.



SER.



SERMON IV.

Infidelity no Excuse for Sin.

[The Third Sermon upon this Text.]

DEUT. xxix. 19.

*And it come to pass when he heareth
the Words of this Curse, that he
bless himself in his Heart, saying, I
shall have Peace, tho' I walk in the
Imagination of mine Heart, to add
Drunkennes to Torist.*



These Words contain three **Vol. III.**
Things observable.

**I. How strongly Man
is inclin'd to Sin.**

**II. That the Threats of God ought
effectually to deter and restrain us
from it.**

III. That

Vol. III.

III. That to Sin on with hope of Impunity, notwithstanding the express Threats of God, is meer Stupidity or Madness.

I have dispatched the *First* and *Second* of these and will now proceed to the

III. And shew you the Folly of those who flatter themselves with Impunity, while they persist in their Sins. That Men too often act thus, is too plain to be denied; for it is almost impossible to imagine that any Man can Sin with a certain Persuasion and Expectation of being damned for it. No Man surely can be so stupid as to be content to forfeit a Heaven, and suffer a Hell, for the sake of any Honour, Pleasure, or Interest upon Earth. For suppose the Honour, Pleasure, or Riches of the present Life were equal in Value to those of the Life to come; yet *the Things which are seen are temporal, but the Things which are not seen are eternal*, even on this Account these things could never come in Comparison with a Rational Man; how much less, when they differ as much in their Excellence as Duration? I must therefore conclude, that a Sinner does not persist in Sin,

Sin, because he thinks it worth the **Ser. IV.**
 while to suffer all that the Gospel
 threatens, for the sake of the Pleasure
 or Advantage he promises himself
 in it; but because he flatters himself,
 that these Threats will never be exe-
 cuted upon him. He deals with him-
 self, as the Jews would have the false
 Prophets do with them, *Prophecie not* **Isa. 30. 10.**
unto us right Things, speak unto us smooth
Things, prophesie Decets. His Lust so-
 licites him, as the Serpent did Eve, *You* **Gen. 3. 4.**
shall not surely die. This the Scripture
 frequently takes notice of, as the misera-
 ble Decelt and Cheat which Man put
 upon themselves. Thus Sinners are re-
 presented as flattering themselves with
Peace and Safety, till sudden Destruction **1 Thes. 5. 3.**
cometh upon them, as travail upon a Wo-
man with Child; and, *Because Sentence a-* **Eccles. 9.**
gainst an evil Work is not executed speed-
ly, therefore the Heart of the Sons of
Men is fully set in them to do Evil. Thus
 the Scoffers, in St. Peter, fortified them-
 selves against the Influence which a Judg-
 ment to come ought to have had upon
 them, they walked after their own Lusts, **2 Pet. 3. 4.**
 and said, *Where is the Promise of his*
Coming? For since the Fathers fell asleep,
 all things continue as they were from the
 beginning of the Creation. Ah! May no
 one

Vol. III. one of us ever sin, and perish by this vain carnal Confidence; but let us ever remember, that tho' God may bear long, he will certainly punish at last; that *his Mercy is infinite as his Majesty, so is his Wrath terrible as his Power.* Let us not deceive our selves with vain Words, and promise our selves a different Event from what the Gospel foretels; but let **Eph. 2. 6.** us assure our selves, that *the Wrath of God will certainly come upon the Children of Disobedience.* Let us often have in our Thoughts the Verse following my Text, wherein God threatens the Sinner who hardens himself in his Infidelity, *The Lord will not spare him, but then the Anger of the Lord and his Jealousy shall smoke against that Man.*

My Business therefore shall be to convince you of the Stupidity and Madness of this kind of Conduct in Sinners, who *deceive themselves with vain Words,* and strengthen themselves in their Wickedness, by promising themselves that they shall escape all the Evils that are denounced against Sin. To this End it will be sufficient to examine the Grounds on which this their Hope stands, and to demonstrate the Weakness and Folly of them. Now these are Two.

First,

First, Infidelity.

Secondly, Presumption.

Infidelity, when a Man persuades himself, that these are not the Threats of God, but the vain Imaginations of some Enthusiast, or the Devices of an Impostor. *Presumption*, when a Man persuades himself, that tho' these are the Threats of God, yet he will not be so severe as he threatens.

First, Infidelity. The Verse before my Text ascribes the Confidence of the Sinner, to his turning away from the Lord our God, or to a Root that beareth Gall and Wormwood, i. e. as appears by parallel Expressions in the New Testament to some Vice bringing forth Apostacy and Infidelity. But how little Ground a Sinner can have for his Unbelief, may easily appear from these following Considerations.

1. The Sinner must not only disbelieve the Mysteries of our Religion, but those Doctrines in which all such as pretend even to Natural Religion do agree, as well as all Communions of Christians : He must not only deny a *Trini-*

Vol III. *ty*, the *Incarnation* of the *Son of GOD*,
 and such like ; but he must deny a *GOD*,
 and a *Judgment to come* ; or if he grant
 a *GOD*, he must reject that great *Mes-*
 sage of the *Gospel*, *That GOD is Light*,
 1 Joh. I. 5. *and in him is no Darknes at all*. For if
 he believes a *Judgment to come*, if he
 believes a *GOD*, a holy *GOD*, who loves
Righteousness and hates *Iniquity*, I can-
 not possibly see how he can ever think
 to escape the *Punishment* due to his *Sins* ;
 so that, in *Effect*, before a *Sinner* can
 derive any reasonable *Security* from his
Infidelity, he must not only renounce
 the *Christian Religion*, but *Natural*
 too ; he must not only cast aside *Revelation*,
 but the first *Principles of Reason*. For
Man, by the *Light of Nature*, has ever
 acknowledged, that there is an *intrinsic*
Difference between *moral Good* and *Evil*,
 that there is in every *Man's Bosom* a *Law*
 of *Nature* prescribing to him what he
 is to do, and what he is not to do. It
 has ever been allow'd by *Mankind*, That
 there is a *GOD* ; That the *Creature* should
 Depend upon, *Worship*, and *Obey* his
Creator ; That every one should be go-
 vern'd by his *Reason* and *Conscience*, not
Humor, *Lust*, or *Fancy* ; and as a neces-
 sary *Consequence* of these *Things*, the
World has in general ever believ'd, that
 we

we must give an Account of our Actions Ser. IV. one time or other, and that then we shall fare well or ill, according to what we have done in this World. These are the great Branches of Natural Religion, and they are built upon the common Principles of right Reason, and have been embrac'd throughout the World by all that have given themselves leave to reflect either upon the World or Themselves, or to consider and examine the Principles they act upon. How foolish and absurd a thing now is Infidelity ! How stupid is the Sinner, who on this Account promises himself Impunity in his Sins ! In what a Condition is that Man, who must inevitably be Miserable, eternally Miserable, unless there be no real Difference between Moral Good and Evil ; unless there be in Man no Conscience, no Liberty ; unless there be no GOD, no Judgment to come !

To what purpose do these unhappy Men cavil at the Mysteries of Religion ? Alas ! Whether these Truths can be comprehended or not, whether we do expound 'em exactly or not, this signifies little to them. Let them govern themselves by those Principles and Precepts of Religion, which all Christians are agreed in, and the Light of Nature recom-

Vol. III. mends, and then we shall have reason to judge that they act sincerely and rationally; and to hope, that God will one time or other make known to 'em whatever is further necessary to be believ'd.

In vain again do such Men as these hunt after Defects and Errors, and slight Appearances of Contradiction in the *Scriptures*. For suppose we admit any such thing in them in Matters of lighter Moment; this, *first*, can never excuse them in throwing off the avow'd Principles, and Precepts of the *Gospel*. *Next*, it must still remain to be prov'd whether they were originally there, or came in, by several Accidents, in time, like *Tares* in the *Field* where only good *Seed* was sown; and *lastly*, whether a mixture of Human Infirmary in the *Pen-Men* of the *Scriptures*, I mean with respect to Language and Expression, or some Circumstances of no great Consequence, may not consist well enough with the wise and great Ends of Divine Inspiration.

Mat. 13.

2. These Men, who reject Religion upon pretence of Myſtery and Contradiction; do yet, in order to overthrow Religion, advance the most absurd and contradictory Opinions that can be, and pretend to believe them. For Example,
if

if they will reject reveal'd Religion, they Ser. IV.
must believe, That Cheats and Impostors
could foretel, many Ages before they
came to pass, strange and wonderful
Things which none but GOD could ac-
complish, and yet fell out accordingly :
That *Jesus* and the *Apostles* did combine
together to deceive and seduce the
World, without any View of Pleasure,
Honour, or Advantage to themselves :
That a Doctrine which aims at nothing
but Wisdom and Purity, Godliness and
Charity, and overthrows the Errors and
Vices of the World, can be the Invention
of wicked Impostors: That poor, ig-
norant, unlearned Men should in a Mo-
ment be endow'd by natural Means
with a Knowledge of the various Lan-
guages of the World, in order to preach
this Gospel; and that upon their preach-
ing, how mysterious soever it was,
both *Jew* and *Gentile* should, by Thou-
sands at a time, quit their inveterate
Prejudices and habitual Vices, and em-
brace Truth and Vertue, without any
secular Motive, without any solid Reason
or Miracle. They must, finally, believe,
That the *Apostles* and Followers of our
Lord cou'd be impos'd upon in so notori-
ous a Fact as his Death and Resurrecti-
on; or, That they all agreed to persist

Vol. III. unto the Death, in attesting the Resurrection, tho' they were assur'd beforehand, that they should reap nothing from this Attestation, but Reproach and Loss of all, and Bonds, Stripes, and Death. One would think he must not be of a very incredulous Temper, who can swallow down such Contradictions as these; and yet such we see there are, as can readily admit of all this, tho' at the same time they strain at every Appearance of a Difficulty on the side of Truth, and raise all the Cavils which either Wit or Malice can suggest in opposition to it.

But there are still more, and (if possible) greater Absurdities, which Men are forced to take up with, before they can cashire Natural Religion. They must affirm, contrary to what every Man feels in himself, that we have no Choice, no Liberty; but that all our Thoughts and Actions are Fatal and Necessary, the meer Effects of Matter and Mechanism: That there is no Difference between Moral Good and Evil; and that 'tis as commendable to murder a Father or ravish a Sister, as to protect the Innocent or relieve the Needy; to betray one's Country, as to defend it: That there is no God, no Providence, or at least no Punish-

Punishment for Wickedness; because Ser. IV. tho' GOD may love what is good, yet he cannot hate what is evil. They must believe, that Understanding and Life may proceed from what is stupid and senseless; that Beauty and Order may spring from Confusion and Chance; that a World fram'd with wonderful Wisdom, exact Symetry, and Proportion, and a necessary Subserviency of all the Parts one to another, had no Author, no Contriver. They talk indeed such monstrous Things concerning the Origin of the World, of Vegetables, Animals, and even Man himself, that I am asham'd to recite them. They believe Local Motion without a Beginning, a World consisting of Corruptible Parts to be Eternal; they believe Trees and Plants to have grown out of the Earth without any Seed, and all Living Creatures to have started forth without any one to beget or create them. In a word, they must either believe Mortal and Corruptible Things to have been Eternal and without Beginning, or else that when they were not, they gave themselves Beginning. And lastly, if they will not own Religion to have been from the Beginning, they must say, That on a Time the World was in a Fit

Vol. III. of Lunacy, and renouncing their Natural Liberty, devis'd and impos'd on themselves the Fetters of Religion and Virtue, and bound them on by the Terrors of a God and a Judgment to come. How sincerely Men act, who renounce Natural Religion, and yet pretend to talk and think at this rate, is what I now propose to inquire into in the *Third Place*.

3. 'Tis not want of Proof, but want of Sincerity and Honesty that makes Men Infidels. God requires no Man either to believe more than he has Reveal'd, or to embrace any thing for Revelation, unless he gives plain Evidence and uncontrollable Proofs of its being so. *This is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men lov'd Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds were Evil.* The Answer of Abraham to the rich Man in the Parable, does plainly enough intimate, that if his Brethren persisted in their Infidelity, they would be inexcusable; because no sincere Man could stand in need of any fuller Proof to satisfy them of the Truth of the Mosaic and Prophetic Inspiration than they already enjoy'd. *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be perswaded tho' one rose from the Dead.*

John 3. 19.

Luke 16.
31.

Dead. And our Saviour seems to me Ser. IV.
plainly enough to teach, that no Man
shall perish for Infidelity, if either in-
vincible Ignorance or want of Evidence
be the Cause of it. *If ye were blind,* John 9.41.
ye should have no Sin: but now ye say,
we see; therefore their Sin re-
maineth.—*If I had not done among them* Chap. 19.
the Works which none other Man did, v. 24.
they had not had Sin.

Now if this be the Case, if Men's Lusts
and Passions corrupt their Understand-
ings, if they oppose Obstinacy and Wil-
fulness against the Revelation of God,
and shut their Eyes against the Light,
no Man surely can think it reasonable,
that this Infidelity should exempt him
from the Punishment of his Sins, and
screen him from the Wrath of God. I
know very well, that an Infidel will
tell me, that this is but begging the
Question; that 'tis in vain to go about
to press them with *Scripture*, since the
Authority of it is the very Thing con-
troverted: But I do not urge *Scripture*
to confute their Infidelity, but to con-
vince them, that if the Case be such
as I have represented it, Infidelity is it
self an unpardonable Crime, and there-
fore very unlikely to procure Impunity
for their other Sins.

I will

Vol. III. I will not now go about to shew, that Natural and Reveal'd Religion have all the Evidence that a reasonable or impartial Man can desire; this is not the Work of half an Hour; but I will appeal to the Conscience of the Infidel himself; and force him to confess, that he does not act honestly and uprightly in this Matter.

1st. Do you really love the Truth? Do you desire to be rightly inform'd, and are you sincerely and impartially dispos'd to embrace that Opinion which has the strongest Arguments on its Side?

2^{dly}. Have you diligently examin'd what Proofs Natural and Reveal'd Religion are confirm'd by?

3^{dly}. Have you really acted according to that Light and Strength you have enjoy'd?

These are very proper Questions to be put to an Unbeliever; for if a Man fail in either or all of these Points, 'tis no wonder at all if he err; nor has he any thing to complain of, if he perish for ever in his Error.

1st. If a Man has an Aversion for the Truth, What wonder if God gives him up to believe a Lye? If a Man never gives himself the Trouble to enquire into and examine the Grounds on which
Reli-

Religion stands, what wonder if Ignorance, a corrupt Conversation, and his own Propension to Sin and Folly, do betray him into Infidelity, and then harden him in it? *Finally*, if a Man does not act according to the Light and Strength he enjoys, What Reason is there to expect that God should give him more? Or what wonder is it, if all Principles of, or Tendencies to Wisdom and Virtue, be by degrees utterly extinguish'd in him? Before therefore the Infidel can ever hope to be safe in his Infidelity, he ought seriously to put these Questions to his own Heart. Do I love the Truth? Am I desirous to be inform'd? Am I honestly dispos'd to renounce Infidelity, and embrace Religion, if I can see sufficient Reason for it? 'Tis evident, that they cannot affirm this; for if they were not fond of Error and averse to Truth, Why do they catch at every Appearance, every the least colour of an Argument against Religion, but are impatient of hearing or considering any for it? Why do they think it enough to oppose Fancy, or a little Flash of Wit, to the clearest Reason; and bold Falshoods, and groundless Imaginations, to notorious Facts? In short, how can they be thought free and impartial, who
treat

Vol. III. treat Religion and the Defenders of it with the last degree of Contempt and Injustice, who represent Religion as a Restraint upon the Natural Liberties of Mankind, who look upon the true Notion of God as a Terror to weak Minds, and Virtue as meer Bondage and Slavery; and represent those that defend Religion, as Men either destitute of Integrity or Sense, and advancing Christianity, either thro' Avarice and Ambition, or Ignorance and Folly? No Man can reflect upon these Things, and not evidently see, That none are more partial and preposse's'd, none are greater Slaves or more Stupid, than those who pretend to rescue the Liberties of Man out of the Fetters of Religion; That they are against Religion, because Religion is against them; and hate it as *Adab* did the Prophet *Micajah*, because it does not prophesse Good concerning them, but Evil, as being utterly irreconcilable to the Fancies and Lusts, which they are given up to. Can we think now, That the God of Truth can approve of such as these? or, That he will admit of their Infidelity as an Excuse for their Sin, when their Infidelity it self is wholly owing to the blind Passion they have for one Sin or other?

1 Kings 22:
8.

ady.

adly. If an Unbeliever would clear *Sen. IV.* himself of all imputation of acting insincerely, he must be able to say, That he has diligently and impartially weigh'd the Arguments offer'd for, and against Religion. But how is it possible to believe this, when we find 'em exploding what they do not understand, objecting as Contradictions and unconceivable Difficulties, Opinions which are not to be found in *Scripture*, only they are desirous to fasten them upon it, in order to expose it? They use the *Gospel* as *Papists* do the Professors of it, devise Heresy where they do not find it. How can we ever think, that they have well weigh'd the Arguments against Religion when they are so Obstinate; and yet all that is said in Defence of Infidelity may be reduc'd under two Heads, either such Principles as are direct Contradictions to the common Sense of Mankind, or such Flights of Humour and Fancy as have much more of Impudence than Wit in them. Men that satisfy themselves in such a manner as this, can never, surely, be thought to examine Things diligently, much less impartially; but rather like those in *Job*, They say unto God, Depart *Chap. 21.* from us, for we desire not the Knowledge *v. 14.* of thy Ways. Is it not an amazing thing to reflect

Vol. III. reflect upon this Conduct ? That ever
 Men should hazard their Souls, their
 Happiness, their Eternity upon such
 a Bottom as this !

3. *Lastly* : Before these Men can acquit themselves honestly in this Matter, they ought to be able to satisfy the World and themselves, that they live up to the Light and Strength they have. But alas ! for Infidels to affirm this, would be *Protestatio contra factum*, to make Profession directly contrary to their Actions. They in Words magnify Human Nature, but they live like Brutes or Fiends : They speak great swelling Words of Vanity, but are the mean while the Servants of Corruption : Their whole Conduct is a direct War against right Reason ; this Temporal Life is their All, and they continually cut it short by their Vices ; they look upon Sensual Pleasure as their chief Good, and yet they consume the Health and Vigour of the Body, and dull and mortify Fancy by Excesses and Surfeits. In a word, they talk of Reason ; but are under the Dominion of Falshood and Fashion, Fancy and Humour, Lust and Passion : They talk of Liberty ; but cannot break off those wretched Courses, which they themselves in a serious Fit oftentimes condemn as incon-

inconsistent, I will not say with any future Prospect, but with their Health and Reputation, their Quiet and their Interest. 'Tis apparent, I think, that such as these may indeed be Free-Thinkers, but can never be honest and impartial ones. They do not reject Religion, because any Article of it is hard to be understood, or difficult to be believed, but because the Belief of such Articles oblige them to a Virtuous Life, and this they cannot, will not endure.

The Sum of all is, GOD has denounced terrible Threats against Sin, and nothing can defeat the Influence of them but Infidelity. Nor can we fall into Infidelity, but thro' our own Wickedness and Insincerity. Let no Man therefore fool himself, and harden himself in his Sins, with hopes of Impunity. Alas! What will Awake us? what will Convince us? Shall we leave GOD no Way to Reveal himself to the World? Or can no Proof satisfy us that he has done so? Will we never believe a Heaven 'till we are excluded from it, nor a Hell 'till we fall into it? GOD of his Mercy forbid it!

The End of the Fourth Sermon.

SERMON



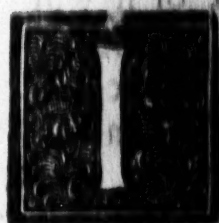
SERMON V.

Of Presumption.

[The Fourth Sermon upon this Text.]

DEUT. xxix. 19.

*And it come to pass when he heareth
the Words of this Curse, that he
bless himself in his Heart, saying, I
shall have Peace, tho' I walk in the
Imagination of mine Heart, to add
Drunkennes to Thrift.*



Have, in the foregoing Dis- Vol. III.
courses on this Subject, ~~~~~
treated,

I. Of the Propension of
Man to Sin.

II. Of the Restraints, which God
has laid upon him by terrible
Threats. And having observ'd to
you,

G

III. That

Vol. III.



III. That notwithstanding these, Man does often harden himself in Sin, with Hope of Impunity, by *Infidelity* and *Presumption*, I expos'd, in my last, the Absurdity and Unreasonableness of the former of these Grounds on which this Hope is built; whereby I made it appear, that *Infidelity* will not lessen but increase the Sinner's Guilt and Punishment. It remains, therefore, I now proceed to the

Second, Which is *Presumption*, i. e. when a Man grants indeed, That there ought to be such a Thing as Religion; That God is a holy God; That Sin is a Transgression of his Commandments, and that it deserves Punishment; but yet flatters himself that the Punishment of it will not be such, either with respect to the Degree, or Duration of it, as it is describ'd in the Gospel. But before I examine what Reason, or rather Colour or Shadow of it, Men have to support this Opinion, I will make three or four Remarks upon this kind of Conduct.

1. Suppose we were certain that the Punishment of Sin would not be so great as the Gospel represents it, or at least as we interpret it; yet methinks Sin would

wou'd be an intolerable Punishment to Ser. V. itself. Sin is in itself a Disease and Distemper, a Stain and Reproach to our Nature. It leaves nothing great, nothing lovely in the Soul of Man; 'tis Darknes in the Understanding, Impotence and Irregularity in the Will, a Depravation in the Affections, and a perpetual Mutiny and Rebellion of all the Faculties and Appetites of the Soul against Truth and Reason. Who must not confess, that it is more easy to a Man to be a Master, than Slave of his Passions; that it is more safe and honourable to be led by his Reason, than Fancy, Lust, or Appetite; and more agreeable to oblige than disoblige, to do Good than to do Harm? So that Sin, compar'd to Virtue, without considering the Effects and Consequences of it, is a State of Evil. 'Tis what Sicknes is to Health; what Weaknes is to Strength; Deformity to Beauty; Disorder, Confusion, Sedition, and Tumult, to Quiet, Order, Peace and Tranquillity. Hence is that of the Prophet *Isaiah*, *The Wicked is like the troubled Sea, when it cannot rest, whose Waters cast up Mire and Dirt. There is no Peace, saith my God, to the Wicked. Uneasiness and Pain, Vexation, and*

Isa. 57. 20.
21.

Vol. III. Trouble, is the inseparable Consequence of such a State, as I have before describ'd. Tho' therefore an Abatement indeed of the Punishment would somewhat diminish the Folly of Sin, the Vileness and Deformity, the Ingratitude to GOD, the Injustice towards Man, the Falshood and Degeneracy that is visible in Sin, wou'd not be hereby at all less'n'd; so that a Sinner, how little soever his Punishment in this or another World might be, would yet be justly loathsom and hateful to GOD and Man, and to himself too, whenever he comes to his Wits. And must not this alone make him extremely miserable? It is to be observ'd,

2. That very few Sinners do escape the evil Consequences of Sin in this Life, both in the Good that it deprives them of, and in the Calamities it brings upon them; and I may venture to affirm, none at all would, were they not to give an Account in another World. And yet even these are so many and so great, that they do exceedingly outweigh whatever Satisfaction Man can find in Sin. We must, whether we will or not, confess, that all Things are full of Trouble; we are wearied with Emptiness and Disappointments, and groan under

under the Evils of Life, there is no Ser. V. Place, no State, no Age, nor Sex that has not some Evil to contend with. Now if you will impartially enquire into the Source and Origin of this Mischief, you'll soon find it to be Sin. There is scarcely any sort of Misfortune or Calamity that does not flow from our own Sin, or that of others. Who knows not that the Divisions of Kingdoms, the Overthrow and Beggary of Families, are all owing to this Cause. *Through Wisdom is an House builded, Prov. 24.3. and by Understanding it is established;* but Folly pulls it down. Vice is a Canker, a Moth, which frets and consumes where-ever it dwells. *Righteousness — 14. 34. exalteth a Nation, but Sin is a Reproach to any People.* And thus it is with particular Persons, *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely, — 10. 9.* but the False and the Injurious walk amidst Snares and Plots, that they are ever-and-anon entangled and taken in. But,

3. Let the Sinner form to himself as soft and easy a Notion as he can of the Punishment of Sin in another World; yet it must be so grievous, that no Satisfaction he can take now in Sin, can reasonably tempt him to undergo it. Suppose *the Worm that dieth not, and the*

Vol. III. *Fire that is not quenched*, shou'd be metaphorical Expressions, and not signify a real Worm or Fire, but Pain and Trouble, which may be resembled to that, which is caus'd by the burning of the one, and the gnawing of the other. Suppose farther, That by these Expressions *for Ever*, and *Everlasting*, and such-like, we are to understand only a long Duration, and not an endless one, when they are applied to Hell; yet are all Christians agreed, That Sin must exclude us from Heaven, from the Presence of God, and the Society of the Blessed; we are all agreed, That Hell must be a State of *Indignation* and *Wrath*, *Tribulation* and *Anguish*; and lastly, none can deny, but that these Words *Everlasting*, and *for Ever*, must signify a very long Duration. Now I leave it to any One to determine, whether any thing but meer Infatuation, and some corrupt stupid Habit, can induce a Man to quit the Hopes of a Heaven, and to endure such a State as he himself must grant Hell to be, for the sake of any Pleasure that he can find in Sin. I will not now insist upon it, tho' it be a great Truth, that the Pleasure of Sin is deceitful, that the Hopes of a Sinner are false and foolish, and that nothing

nothing but virtuous Enjoyments can **Ser. V.**
afford any true and real Satisfaction to a
rational Man, even in this present Life.
No, I will suppose Sin to have all in it,
that the deluded Fancy and senseless
Dotage of a Sinner can propose to itself;
even thus it can never stand in Com-
petition with a Heaven; even thus it
can never be worth any Man's while
to suffer a Hell for it, tho' Hell were
no worse a State than the Sinner him-
self, if he believes any thing of the
Gospel, must suppose it to be. Blessed
God! Can any Man be so stupid, to
compare the Pleasures of a crazy, cor-
ruptible Nature, to those of an incor-
ruptible and Heavenly one? Shall the
Respect and Flattery of a vicious sense-
less Croud be put in the Scales against
the Honour and Glory of Heaven? Can
the fading Beauty, the empty Pomp and
Shew, the faithless Friendship of this
World, vie with the never-fading Beau-
ties of Heaven, the immortal Delights
flowing from the Enjoyment of God,
and the Friendship of Angels and Saints?
Did Sin therefore only exclude us from
Heaven, this were enough to convince
us of the Folly of it. But if, besides
this, Anguish of Mind, Pain and Tor-
ment of Body, Reproach and Shame,

Vol. III. *Darkness and Terror, and this for a very long Time, if not for Ever; if this, I say, over-and-above the Loss of a Heaven, must be the Punishment of Sin; it cannot but appear to us meer Madness, Insensibleness, and the utmost Obduration, to persist in it. I must remark farther,*

4. and *Lastly, That 'tis unpardonable Folly, to venture our Souls upon such a disputable Bottom as this is. For if there were more Comfort in this Notion than there really is, yet it is very uncertain, to say no more, whether their Opinion be true, or not. How will they ever be able to prove, that Torment and Anguish, unquenchable Fire, and a never-dying Worm, Darkness and Death, do signify mild and gentle Punishments? 'Tis surely far more Natural to interpret them of such as are great and unsufferable. How will they be able to prove, That for Ever and Everlasting, nay, for Ever and Ever, do signify only a Long Time, not an Endless one? Or if they do signify only a Long Time, how will they be able to determine how Long this will be, 'till the Instrument of their Punishment be spent and worn out? This is but a forc'd Exposition of Fire that is not quenched, and a Worm,*

Worm, that dieth not, till they them-
selves be consum'd and destroy'd by their
Sufferings. With what Bodies the
Wicked shall rise, is not very clear from
Scripture; nor is it easy to understand,
how Misery can extinguish an immor-
tal Soul, or why God should annihilate
it: Therefore, I think we cannot with
any Certainty infer, from the Nature
of the Criminal in another World, how
long his Punishment will last, e'er it
puts an End to him. Will then the Sin-
ner's Punishment last 'till he has paid the
uttermost Farthing? Alas! Who can
estimate the Provocation of Sin? Who
can tell what he deserves, who lives and
dies impenitent? But this I shall have
Occasion to consider more fully in ano-
ther Place.

Mat. 5. 26.

These general Observations do suffici-
ently evince the Folly of Presumpti-
on; however, because this is a Distem-
per which is very fatal, and very far
spread, I will now examine in particular
by what Arguments Sinners buoy them-
selves up in a vain *Presumption*. They
may be reduced to these Three.

1st, The Multitude of Sinners.

2^{dly}.

Vol. III.

2dly, The Disproportion there is between Sin and Everlasting Punishment.

3dly, The Nature of God.

1st. From the Multitude of Sinners, they argue thus : G O D would never make so many Millions of Creatures, to make them Miserable ; I am content, it should fare with me as the generality of Mankind ; Heaven will be but very thinly Peopled, if none but Saints must Inhabit it. A great many Words are multiplied to this Effect, but to very little Purpose. For,

First, As to what they say, That God would never make so many of his Creatures to make them Miserable ; 'tis easy to Answer,

1. GOD made us Men, but we make our selves Miserable. GOD has vouchsafed us all the Means of Happiness, which either we can desire, or boundless Goodness could prompt GOD to ; but we are deaf to all his Calls, harden our selves against all the Methods of Mercy, resist his Spirit, and receive his Grace in vain. This is the constant Voice of

Eccles. 7. *Scripture, God hath made Man upright ;*
 29. *but they have sought out many Inven-*
 2 Pet. 3. 9. *ons. — Not willing that any should pe-*
rish, but that all should come to Repent-
ance. —

ance.—Who will have all Men to be saved, and to come unto the Knowledge of the Truth.—O Israel, thou has destroyed thyself, but of me is thine Help. *Ser. V.*
1 Tim. 2-4.
Hof. 13. 9. The Sum Total of this is, our Salvation is of GOD, but our Ruin of our selves; and all that is oppos'd to this, is but Trifling and Impertinence, or Sophistry and Subtilty; and when a Sinner argues from the Fore-knowledge of GOD, he does but fight in the Dark, and judges and pronounces of what he does not understand, and cannot fathom. Can't GOD be Wise, unless we can reach all his Designs, unless we can sound the Depths of his Providence, unless we can measure and survey the various Scenes, the Windings and Mysteries of the Divine Government from the Beginning to the End of Eternity? This, I am sure, however it sounds to the Ear of a Sinner, will sound very harsh to one who has any just Notion of the Majesty of GOD, and the endless Variety of Wisdom that appears even in those Administrations, which are visible to us. *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; Deut. 29.*
but those things which are reveal'd belong 29.
 unto us and our Children. All that we can comprehend about this Matter is this, That GOD well enough foreknew both what sort of Creatures he would make, and what

Vol. III. what sort of Means he would afford ~~us~~ 'em; and consequently, That his Rational Creatures would be a perpetual Subject of exercising his Wisdom and Power, his Goodness and Justice; and farther then this we cannot go. Add to this,

2. That as GOD affords all Men sufficient Means of Happiness; so, on the other side, he requires nothing of us, but what we our selves must judge highly reasonable for him to require, *i. e.* That we should make an honest Use of the Means he has vouchsafed us; That, if we Sin, we should be sorry for it, and take Care to do so no more; and *Lastly*, That we should endeavour to grow better, and rely upon him for Assistance. In short, he requires of us Sincerity, not Perfection; and wherein we transgress against Sincerity, he accepts of our Sorrow for it, joyn'd with a true Sense of our Demerit, and an humble Reliance upon his Goodness and Mercy. And now, I am sure, I may venture to appeal to any one, whether the Pardoning all but the Impenitent and Obdurate, must not sufficiently free GOD from the Charge of Cruelty? Whether the Revelations which at *sundry times, and in divers manners* he has vouchsafed the World, the various Attempts of his Providence to reform it, the

the Sufferings of his dearly-beloved Son, Serl V. and the strugglings of his Spirit against the Impieties of Men, will not abundantly vindicate the Goodness of God; tho' he should at last exact a severe Vengeance of all ungodly Sinners. This is abundantly enough to be said to the *First Part* of the Objection.

As to the *Second Part* of it, it is but an odd sort of Comfort, which Sinners can take from, their being to suffer no more than a Croud of other Men. There's no Reason why the Universality of an Evil should diminish, but rather increase the Terror of it. It does not render the Pain and Suffering less, but more insupportable, because, in such Case, there is none to comfort us. And as it happens to a divided People, when their Destruction comes upon them; so will it be with the Damned in the other World, all will be upbraiding and reproaching each other as the Cause of their Misery and Ruin. Let us reflect upon Matter of Fact. Can we think, that it could any way tend to assuage the Affliction of this or that *Jew* in particular, that the whole Nation was to perish by the *Romans*? Or do we think it would have been a Comfort to any Family in *Sodom*, for them to have known that not one of 'em should escape

Vol. *U*escap^e the consuming Fire of God? Or were any of the Old World that perish'd by the Deluge of Waters the less punish'd, because *all Flesh died that mov'd upon the Earth?*

But if all Sinners shall be damn'd; How few, say they, (which is the *last* part of the Objection) must the Number of the Heavenly Inhabitants be? This is so idle and frivolous, that it's scarcely fit to be mention'd. Can Heaven want Inhabitants, when Myriads of Angels wait before the Throne of God? How many Ranks and Orders do we read of in the Heavenly Hierarchy, and each of 'em, for ought we know, very numerous?

Mat. 3. 9. Can God, who was *able of the Stones to raise up Children unto Abraham*, want Colonies to plant Heaven with?

Thus have I Answer'd this Objection, but cannot quit it without observing, that an ill Stomach turns that Food into Flegm and a Disease, which a good one turns into Nourishment and Strength: A corrupt Mind makes a very pernicious Use of that, which a sound one would reap great Advantage from. The multitude of Sinners encourages the Foolish to go on in Sin; but Wise Men make a very different Use of this Reflexion.

Acts 2. 40. St. Peter exhorted the Jews to *save themselves from that untoward Generation.*
Which

Which was as much as to say, The more Ser. V.
 Wickedness was spread, the more ought they to guard themselves against it; for the more Epidemical it was grown, the more fatal would it prove. And thus St. Paul urges the Increase of Wickedness, as a Motive to Vigilance and Caution; *See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as Wise, redeeming the Time, because the Days are Evil.* And thus our Blessed Master excites us to Care and Solitude for Life, because the Number of them that perish is very great; *Strive to enter in at the strait Gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able:* And with the same View, he elsewhere, recites many Historical Passages; *But I tell you of a Truth, Many Widows were in Israel in the Days of Elias, when the Heaven was shut up three Years and six Months, when great Famine was through out all the Land: but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta a City of Sidon, unto a Woman that was a Widow. And many Lepers were in Israel in the Time of Eliseus the Prophet; and none of them was cleans'd, saving Naaman the Syrian.*

Eph. 5.16.

Luke 13. 24.

Luke 4. 25, 26, 27.

The End of the Fifth Sermon.

SERMON

SERMON VI.

Of Presumption.

[The Fifth Sermon upon this Text.]

DEUT. xxix. 19.

And it come to pass when he heareth the Words of this Curse, that he bless himself in his Heart, saying, I shall have Peace, tho' I walk in the Imagination of mine Heart, to add Drunkenness to Thrift.



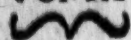
Have dwelt longer than Vol. III. I am wont on this Text, but the Reason was, the Variety and Importance of the Matter it contains.

I have from it discours'd,

H

I. Cf

Vol. III.



I. Of our Propension to Sin.

II. Of the Restraints GOD has laid upon us to keep us from it.

III. Of our Folly in promising our selves Impunity, and so hardning our selves in Sin, in Defiance of the Threats of GOD. This, I told you, flows from Two Things.

First, From Infidelity, by which we perswade our selves, that there is no Punishment for Sin. Which is insinuated in that Expression of the *Psalmist*, *The Fool hath said in his Heart, There is no God.*

Secondly, From Presumption, by which we perswade our selves, that if there be any Punishment for Sin, yet it will not be so great as we are generally taught to believe it. I have treated of Infidelity; and without entering into the Reasons for Religion, or Objections against it, have shewn, That Infidelity will not excuse but aggravate our Guilt and Punishment; because the whole Conduct of the Infidel, in this Matter, shews he does not act honestly and impartially.

In my last Discourse I began to treat Ser. VI. of Presumption, and to evince the Folly of it, I did,

1st. In general, lay before you these Four Considerations.

1. That if there were no Punishment for Sin, yet it is in it self a great Evil.

2. Many and great are the ill Consequences of Sin in this Life, and it is very seldom the Sinner escapes 'em.

3. There must be a Future Judgment, and the Sinner can never so diminish the Punishment of Sin, but that he must grant it will be long and grievous.

4. 'Tis Madness to venture All upon so disputable a Notion.

2^{dly}. I began to examine in particular the Grounds of this Presumption. These are three.

First, The multitude of Sinners.

Secondly, The Nature of Sin. And

Thirdly, The Nature of God. I have consider'd the *First* of 'em, and will now proceed to the

Second Ground of Presumption, viz. The Nature of Sin. Many are the Arguments drawn from hence, to lessen the Future Punishment of it; but, I doubt not, I shall make it evident they are very

H a

Weak,

Vol. III. Weak. What they say, may be reduced
 to these three Heads.

1st. That Sin is unavoidable, and therefore challenges Compassion.

2^{dly}. That the Fruit we reap from it is very inconsiderable, and therefore, the Sinner will be hardly dealt with, if he suffer great Evil from it.

3^{dly}. That it cannot be so loathsome and provoking in its Nature as Preachers represent it, and therefore it cannot deserve such Punishment as they threat'n it with

Of these in their Order.

1st. Sin is unavoidable, and from hence they infer, That it is unjust to punish it severely. And I should grant them more than this, That if it was strictly and properly unavoidable, it could not in Justice be punished at all, much less severely by God, who is infinitely Merciful and Good, as well as Just and Holy; nay, the Sinner, on this Supposition, would rather deserve Pity than Punishment. But the Truth is, how finely soever they flourish upon this Subject, all is but a vain Pretence, utterly destitute of Truth and Reason. For

1. Altho'

1. Altho' no Man ever did pass his whole Life without Sin, yet no Man can say of any particular deliberate Sin, that it was unavoidable, or that it was truly impossible for him to abstain from it. How can Sin be voluntary, and yet unavoidable? How can it be a Man's Crime to commit this or that Sin, if it was impossible for him to do otherwise? If this could be suppos'd, I see not why the Conscience of the Sinner should condemn him; I see not what should move him to repent, or God to punish him. Man is indeed beset with Temptations, but such as may be conquer'd. He is frail and prone to Sin; but he is encompass'd with the Providence of GOD, and aided and strengthen'd by his Word and Spirit. *There hath no Temptation taken you, but such as is common to Man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the Temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* And thus whilst the same Apostle sets forth the Weakness and Frailty of the Natural Man, *Rom. 7.* he magnifies the Strength of Divine Grace, *Rom. 8.* And therefore in those Verses, in which he joyns both Chapters together, by a very natural Transition, he mingles Humiliatoin and

1 Cor. 10:13

Vol. III. Joy, Confession and Thanksgiving together: *O wretched Man that I am, who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death! I thank God, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.* It must then remain firm and unshaken, That Sin is voluntary, and consequently inexcusable, and justly punishable. *Let God be true, but every Man a Liar.* The whole Matter will be very clear, if we call to Mind that Doctrine which our Saviour has advanc'd, That GOD will judge every Man at the Last Day, according to the Light and Strength which he afforded him, To whom he gave little, of him he will require little; and to whom he gave much, of him he will require the more. But farther:

Rom. 3. 4.

Luke 12.
48.

2. GOD does not require, that we should be without Sin, but that we should repent of it, and break it off. 'Tis true, all Sin is forbidden in general upon Pain of Damnation; and consequently, any one single Sin renders us liable to Damnation: So that *Every Mouth must be stopped, and all the World become guilty before God; for by the Deeds of the Law shall no Flesh living be justified in his sight.* But then GOD, in boundless Mercy and Compassion, has provided a Remedy for this universal Misery; he hath sent his Son to be — *Ver. 25. a Propitiation for our Sins; and to redeem*

deem us, by his own Sufferings, from the Ser. VI. Wrath to come. So that, properly speaking, none perish now, because they have fallen into Sin, but because they persist carelessly, wilfully, and impenitently in it: GOD not requiring of us unsinning Obedience; but Repentance and Faith, as the Condition of Salvation.

3. If when Men say, That Sin is unavoidable, that no Man lives without Sin, that the best Men and the best Actions are not without a Mixture of it; if, when they use these or the like Expressions, they mean by Sin, Defects and Failings, Surprises and Inadvertencies, or Mistakes in Matters of little or no Moment, or *Lastly*, the first Motions or Bubblings of any inordinate Inclination, before it be consented to; Then I answer, That in this sense of the word, Sin indeed is unavoidable, and to these sorts of Sin all good Men are liable, more or less, according to the degrees of Holiness to which they have advanced. But then these are not the Sins against which the *Scripture* denounces Damnation. For the Proof of which Assertion, I may appeal to the *Law* of *Moses*, and to the whole *Epistle* to the *Romans*, wherein the *Apostle* expounds at large the Doctrine of Justification. These, I confess, are to be watch'd against, because they

Vol. III. have a Tendency to Sin ; but whether they be any where in *Scripture* call'd Sin, or whether the *Scripture* Notion of Sin, *the Transgression of the Law*, do strictly belong to them, I very much doubt. But if Men will affirm these to be *Transgressions of the Law*, they must mean Transgressions of the Law of Perfection, but not of the Law of Sincerity : I am sure, 'tis very contrary to the Language of *Scripture*, to say a
 --- Ver. 9. Regenerate or Good Man lives in Sin, whereas the best of Men live in these. But alas, the Sins we charge the Presumptuous Sinner with, and for which we denounce a Hell, against him, are not of this sort. 'Tis wilful Sin, 'tis deliberate Wickedness, repeated and crying Provocations, for which a Hell is prepar'd ; and therefore no Man can, from the unavoidableness of Sin, in this sense, infer, that the Future Punishment of it will be slight and inconsiderable. But,

2dly. The Fruit of Sin is little ; and therefore it is very hard, say they, that a slight Pleasure or trifling Interest should be punish'd with a great and intolerable Pain ; or a short and vanishing Satisfaction, with an Everlasting Evil. Here I will grant more than is contended for, not only that the Fruit of Sin is an inconsiderable Good ; but

but very commonly a great and pernicious Evil. Weakness and Pain, Deformity, Diseases, and Death it self, or at least Mischief and Trouble, Loss and Calamity in our Fortunes, Shame and Reproach, Hatred and Division, are the common Consequences of it; nay, most Sins are even in themselves so far from being pleasant and agreeable, that they are vexatious, painful, and tormenting. But to all this, I Answer, Punishment is to be proportion'd to the Evil of Sin, not to the Good we reap from it, or the Time we take up in committing it: Therefore the Punishment of Sin may be very justly sharp and lasting, when the Pleasure or Profit of it is very short and very empty. This does not extenuate, but aggravate the Guilt of Sin. The more Restraints GOD lays upon us, the greater is our Guilt in breaking through them; the less our Pleasure or Profit is in Sin, the greater is our Folly and Madness in committing it. In a word, this it is that the *Prophets* and *Apostles* complain of, that Men are wicked, without any considerable Temptation to be so; that they destroy their Souls, forfeit a Heaven and incur a Hell, for empty, uncertain, transitory Things. *Be astonished, O ye Heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate,* *saith*

Ser. VI

Jer. 2. 12,
13.

Vol. III. saith the Lord. For my People have committed two Evils; they have forsaken Me the Fountain of Living Waters, and hewed them out Cisterns, broken Cisterns that can hold no Water. Thus St. Paul,

Rom. 6. 21. What Fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now asham'd? For the End of those things is Death. Not to multiply Texts needlessly, I think there is no one thing which the Scripture more frequently puts us in mind of than this, That the things which are seen, are

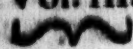
2 Cor. 4. 18. Temporal; but the things which are not seen, are Eternal. That the World passeth away, and the Lust thereof; but he

1 John 2. 17. that doth the Will of God, abideth for ever. That Temptations to Sin are but Deceits and Cheats, and that the best that can accrue from it is Vanity and Vexation. Now the Scripture does this, to dissuade us from Sin, to convince us of the Folly and Madnes of it, and to justify God in his Proceedings against it. How then must that Man run counter to common Sense, who shall argue thus, That the Punishment of Sin can't be great, because the Temptation to it is very little; that since we reap nothing from transgressing the Laws of God, trampling on the Blood of the Covenant, and the like, therefore we shall suffer nothing, or very little for

for it. Thus have I Answer'd the *Second Ser. VI.* Objection, taken from the Nature of Sin, and shewn you, that the Shortness and Worthlesness of the Interest or Pleasure which we find in Sin, does aggravate our Guilt, and therefore can't diminish our Punishment. It is Objected,

3dly, and lastly, That Sin can't be so loathsome and provoking to GOD, as is pretended, and therefore will not be punished in so severe a manner as we are told. I Answer,

1. We should not, methinks, argue thus, We cannot see any thing very disgusting, odious, or provoking in Sin, and upon that Account, can never believe that GOD will punish it with grievous and everlasting Pains; but, on the contrary, thus: GOD denounces against Sin, Grievous and Everlasting Punishments, therefore there must be something in it extremely hateful and provoking. This way of arguing will appear certainly the more just, if we consider, that GOD is a Wise, a Merciful, a Gracious GOD, nay, infinitely so. If then his Wrath be kindled against Sin; if he has an irreconcilable Hatred of it; we may fairly infer from hence, that it is repugnant to his Nature, and incompatible with his wise and

Vol. III. and great Ends. When GOD declares,
 *As I live, saith the Lord God, I have*

Ezek. 33. *no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked,*
 11. *but that the Wicked turn from his Way*

and live: When he makes this Character
 his Glory, That he is merciful and gra-

Exod. 34. *cious, Long-suffering, and abundant in*
 6, 7. *Goodness and Truth, keeping Mercy for*

Thousands, forgiving Iniquity, Transgres-

sion, and Sin: Can we imagine that he

can turn Tyrant? That he can enact

sanguinary and cruel Laws, without any

Necessity? That he can take Pleasure

in the inexpressible Misery of his Crea-

tures, and persecute with horrible

Wrath and Vengeance slight and incon-

siderable Offences? But,

2. However we may palliate or var-

nish over Sin, or pass Judgment upon

it very partially; we must remember,

that what may appear very tolerable to

us, may be very abominable to GOD.

Sinners, whose Affections are perverted,

and their very Understandings deprav'd,

may very well judge more favourably

of Sin than a Holy God will. But then

they ought to consider, That the Judg-

ment of God is according to Truth, and

that their own is false and partial. The

Scripture indeed tells us, That Fools

make a mock at Sin. That the Wicked

are

Rom. 2. 2.

Prov. 14.

9.

are by Degrees blinded, their Consci- Ser. VI.
ences are *past feeling*, and they have a *Reprobate* and undistinguishing Mind: 
She eateth and wipeth her Mouth, and Prov. 30.
saith, I have done no Wickedness. They 20.
come, in a word, to call Evil Good, and Isa. 5. 20.
Good Evil; to put Darkness for Light,
and Light for Darkness; to put Bitter
for Sweet, and Sweet for Bitter. But
what Excuse can this afford them? Can
that be their Apology, which our Sa-
viour says is their *Condemnation*, *That*
Light is come into the World, and Men John 3. 19.
loved Darkness rather than Light? No,
no; if we see not a Deformity in Sin,
the Fault is in our Eyes, a corrupt
Heart has perverted our Judgment.
When we recover our Understanding,
then shall we condemn our Sins: The
better we grow, the worse shall we
think of Sin: The more like God
we are, the more perfectly shall we
abhor it. Thus you read in Scrip-
ture that it has been with all the
Saints of God. How bitterly have they
bewail'd their Sin? How utterly have
they renounced it? And how severely
have they revenged it upon themselves?
And if you would learn the Nature of
Sin from them, you shall find them de-
scribing it, by Leprosy, by Sores and
Ulcers,

Vol. III. Ulcers, by Darknes and Corruption,
 by Diseases and Death. In a word, on
 this Account it is, that the *Scriptures*
 attribute to the Religious *Wisdom* and
Understanding; but to Sinners, *Blindness*
 and *Folly*; that it calls one *the Chil-*
dren of the Light, and of *the Day*; but
 the other, the *Children of the Night*,
 and of *Darkness*. Let us now,

Eph. 5. 8.

1 Theff. 5.

5.

3. Consider Sin in it self. And here
 we must look upon it either as a Trans-
 gression of a Positive, or Moral Law.
 The Truth is, under Christianity, we
 have not any Commands so meerly po-
 sitive as not to have an apparent Ten-
 dency to wise and good Ends, as is evi-
 dent in the Instances of Baptism and
 the Eucharist, and the Rules given for
 the Government of the Church; but if
 this was otherwise, 'tis plain, that a
 Precept purely positive, i. e. such a one
 as has no Tendency, that we can dis-
 cern, to any good End, and contains
 something which we can see no Rea-
 son for observing, but this one only,
 that it is commanded; even the Trans-
 gression of such a Precept as this has
 something in it very vile and detestable;
 namely, Ingratitude to God, the Viola-
 tion of our solemn Covenant, and In-
 solence and Rebellion against the great
 Sovereign

Sovereign of the World. But I need **Ser. VI.**
not insist on this Notion of Sin now; the direct and apparent Design of the Gospel is Holiness; all its Precepts have this in view; and under this Dispensation, there is no Transgression, which does not imply and include in it a manifest Immorality, Obliquity, and Turpitude. Wou'd a Sinner now see what Deformity and Provocation there is in Sin, let him examine the Corruption of his Heart, the deplorable Effects of Sin, the Obligations he lies under to Virtue, the Means of Grace which he neglects, the Motives which he slights and resists; and from all this, let him collect what his Guilt amounts to. All these general Heads contain so many Particulars under them, that it will be impossible for me, in the Time that now remains, to draw forth any Thoughts to a full Length, or to range them in a distinct Order; 'twill be enough for me to lay them in Heaps before you.

As to the Corruption of a Sinner's Heart; How is it alienated from God, and disaffected to Man? What Blindness and Folly, what Perverseness and Vileness does possess and influence it? As to the immediate Effects of Sin; it dishonours God, injures our Neighbour, debases

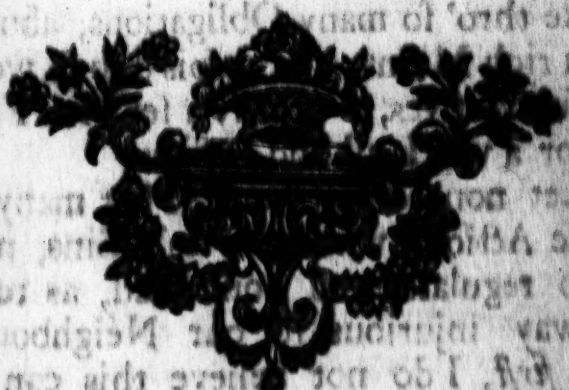
Vol. III. debases and depraves our Nature. If we reflect upon the Obligations we lie under to Virtue; how many, and how great are they? Innumerable are the Mercies of GOD; and those which relate to *Christ* are amazing and astonishing. If we reflect upon the Means GOD has afforded us; he has written his Law in our Hearts; his Works of Creation and Providence, are very visible and glorious Manifestations of his Eternity, Wisdom, Power, and Goodness. But over and above all this, he has reveal'd his Will from Heaven, and that by his only begotten Son; he is ever ready to communicate his Holy Spirit to us, and to direct and guide us in all our Affairs and Actions by his special Providence. *Lastly*, If we consider the Calls and Motives to Virtue, the Discouragements and Disinclinings from Vice, which GOD has set before us; we shall surely conclude, That as 'tis no small Wickedness, so it can be no small Provocation, for a Man to despise and break through all these. Add to all this now, the many Convictions, which every Man has one time or other felt; the Disappointments, the Chastisements, the Solicitations of the Spirit, by which GOD has endeavour'd to bring him home to himself; together

ther with the solemn, and, it may be, **Ser. VII.**
repeated Vows, by which every one
professing Christianity has bound his
Soul to GOD. Let any Man, I say,
put all these Things together, and lay
them seriously and impartially to Heart;
and then let him tell me what he thinks
the Guilt of Sin is; Sin deliberately
committed, and wilfully and impenitent-
ly persisted in. Can he think, that an
impenitent Sinner does not deserve to
be the Object of GOD's Wrath and
Hatred? Can he think, that any thing
less than intolerable Misery can be the
Consequence of GOD's Wrath and Ha-
tred? What can he imagine must be
the State and Company of One in ano-
ther World, who lives and dies in direct
Enmity against GOD and Goodness in
this, and has done so much Evil, and
broke thro' so many Obligations, abused
such rich Means, and despis'd such won-
derful Motives, to gratify a senseless Fan-
cy, or a vile Lust and Passion.

Let none object here, That many of
those Actions which we call Sins, may
be so regulated and conducted, as to be
no-way injurious to our Neighbour;
for, *first*, I do not believe this can be
done, tho' I grant there is a Difference
in Sins, and so there will be in the Pu-
nishment

Vol. III. nishment hereafter. And, *secondly*, If it might be suppos'd, that there are some Sins which are not injurious to our Neighbour; Are there any that do not make us more sensual and earthy? Are there any Sins which do not alienate us from God, and make us distrelsh Spiritual Things? Are there any Sins which do not defraud God of the Honour and Service due to him? And consequently, Are there any Sins which do not imply Folly, Ingratitude, Falsehood, Negligence, and Presumption?

The End of the Sixth Sermon.



S E R-

W. Parker God is not silent
Vol. III. Of the Iniquity in whole
SERMON VII.

Of Presumption.

[The Sixth Sermon upon this Text.]

DEUT. xxix. 19.

And it come to pass when he heareth
the Words of this Curse, that he
bless himself in his Heart, saying, I
shall have Peace, tho' I walk in the
Imagination of mine Heart, to add
Drunkennes to Thirst.

Have from these Words Vol. III.
discours'd,



I. Of our Propension
to Sin.

II. Of the Restraints which God
has laid upon us to keep us from it.

Vol. III.

III. Of the Impunity in whole, or in part, with which a Sinner flatters himself, in Opposition to so many express and terrible Threats of God.

Under this last Head I have treated,

First, Of the Unreasonableness of Infidelity.

Secondly, Of Presumption, i. e. an Opinion some have taken up, That the Punishment of Sin will be but slight and inconsiderable.

I have shewn the Weakness of this Fancy.

1st, By some general Considerations.

2dly, I have examin'd particularly the Arguments they draw to maintain this Opinion.

1. From the Multitude of Sinners.

2. From the Nature of Sin.

I will now proceed to consider what they say to support this Presumption from a third Topic, i. e.

3. From the Nature of God. When Sinners are driven to their last Shift, when they are forced to confess, that the Scriptures, in their natural and obvious Sense, do declare that the Punishment of Sin in another World will be both grievous and everlasting; they will

will yet hope even against Hope, and Ser. VII. expect from God, that he will not be as severe as he threatens; but will abate something, how much they know not, of the Punishment he has denounced. If we enquire why do they expect this from God; all they can say, must be resolv'd into Two Things.

First, That God is not bound to fulfil his Threats. Or,

Secondly, That it can never, as they think, become his Divine Perfections to do so.

First, God is not bound to fulfil his Threats. This, I grant you, hath been said both by *Ancients* and *Moderns*; but has not, I doubt, been so well consider'd as it deserves. For on what Grounds can this be affirmed? These are not the Threats of a rash, mutable Creature, but of the great Creator: They are not particular or occasional Threats denounced against this or that Person, City, or Nation; but they are the Sanctions of those general, those universal Laws by which he has resolv'd to govern the World. Nor are these, *finally*, Threats, which regard a Day

Vol. III. of Trial; but Penalties, which are to take place after the Day of Final Judgment; which makes the Cases of these Threats, and of those against *Nineveh*, or any of the like Nature, very different. When this is consider'd, it will not, I believe, seem unreasonable to doubt, whether God has reserv'd to himself a Liberty of not proceeding against Sinners in another World, according to the Tenor and Import of his Laws; and whether the doing so, can consist with the Dignity and Majesty of the Great Sovereign of the World.

But if we should grant this, What reason have we to hope that God will deal thus favourably with Sinners? There is a Time, even in this World, when God will not be prevail'd with not to execute his Threats, either by the Intercession of the best of Men, or by the Prayers of Sinners themselves. *The* *Noah, Daniel, and Job* were in it, as *I* *live*, saith the Lord God, they shall deliver neither Son nor Daughter; they shall deliver but their own Souls by their Righteousness. — Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me. What Reason then can any one have to fancy, that God will shew more Mercy

Ezek. 14.
20.

Prov. 1.28.

to the Damned in another World? Is Ser. VII.
 not the Day of Grace over? Is not the
 Day of Mercy at an end, together with
 the World? And does not a Day of
 Wrath and Indignation commence upon
 Sinners with the Day of Judgment? Do
 we read of any *Sacrifice for Sin*, or of
 any Grace to be pour'd out for the Con-
 version of Sinners, after the Day of Judg-
 ment? If we do not, I am sure, to
 expect any such Thing is meer Folly
 and Madness; for 'tis to oppose our
 Fancy against the express Sense of Scrip-
 ture; and to hope for Grace and Mercy,
 when this tells us plainly, that the
 Day of Grace and Mercy is past, and
 all beyond it is *Indignation and Wrath*,
Tribulation and Anguish. Their next
 Argument is,

Secondly, That it is inconsistent with
 the Perfections, i. e. with the Justice,
 Wisdom, and Goodness of God, to exe-
 cute upon Sinners grievous and ever-
 lasting Punishments. But to this I An-
 swer,

1st, In general: It can never become
 God, to threaten any Punishment which
 it cannot become him to inflict. I
 think, 'tis direct Blasphemy, to say, that
 God can threaten any thing that is Un-

Vol. III. just, Foolish, or Cruel. God can no more speak than act repugnant to his Nature. His Laws are the Transcript of his Divine Perfections; and if they had any thing in them that was contradictory to Justice, Wisdom, and Goodness, I should think my self oblig'd to believe that they were not the Laws of God. 'Tis an absurd Thing to grant, that the *Scripture* denounces Eternal Punishment against an impenitent Sinner; and yet imagine, at the same time, that it is contrary to the Perfections of God to inflict it. For this is to set God against himself; to make his Laws contradict his Nature, and his Reveal'd Will clash with his Attributes.

If it be here said, May we not argue from the Nature of God, that his Laws must be taken in such a Sense as may comport with it? I grant, we may; but at present, Everlasting Punishments were suppos'd to be the Sense of *Scripture*, when we call'd 'em the Threats of God. But I must add farther, that when the Sense of *Scripture* is plain and obvious, it is very dangerous to argue against such a Sense, from our Notions of the Divine Perfections; because the Perfections of God are incomprehensible, and his Ways past finding out. What God

God reveals plainly, we may boldly rely upon, because it is his Will we should do so; but as to the Inferences which we form from his Nature, we are not sure but that our Lusts and Prejudices may give a wrong Bias to our Reason; and our Conclusions may not be the Product of Judgment, but Fancy and Inclination. And we have the plainest Reason that can be, to doubt this, when our Conclusions thwart the natural and obvious Sense of *Scripture*. Thus far in general. Now I come to examine, in particular, Whether Everlasting Punishment be inconsistent with the Justice, Wisdom, or Goodness of God?

First, With his Justice. Here I will readily grant, that Justice requires, that the Punishment shou'd be proportion'd to the Offence; I will not therefore fly to the absolute Power and unlimited Sovereignty of God; whatever Right the Creator has over his Creatures, yet I am sure his Wisdom and Goodness can never suffer him to exert his Power in any way of arbitrary Cruelty; therefore I stick not boldly to affirm, that God will punish no Man in another World more than his Sins deserve. This is so evident from the different Degrees of Punishment to be inflicted upon Sinners

Vol. III. Sinners in a Future State, that no Man can call it into Question. We read of

Luke 12. some who shall be beaten with many, and some with few Stripes; and that it

Mat. 11. shall be more tolerable for the Land of Sodom, in the Day of Judgment, than for Capernaum. This is enough, enough

abundantly to satisfy this Objection, and to silence all our Scruples: God

will certainly reconcile future Punishments with His Justice, tho' we shou'd not be able to know how; or else, how should the Last Day be called the Day of Re-
Rom. 2. 5. *velation of the Righteous Judgment of God?*

I will not pretend to fathom the Depths of God's Administration; however, I will lay before you several Things which may contribute to enlighten our Understandings somewhat in this Matter, and induce us to think, that Grievous and Everlasting Punishments may be so distributed and inflicted, as to be no way repugnant to Divine Justice.

1st. This ought to weigh very much with us, that the Scripture every-where teaches us, that there is a great Malignity and Provocation in Sin; that the Indignation of God against Sin is both great and just; that the Judgment of God against it in a Future State is according to Truth; that there is such an utter

Repugnancy

Repugnancy and Contradiction between **Ser. VII.**
 Sin and the Divine Nature, that it is impossible that God should be reconcil'd to the Impenitent, or should behold Iniquity with Approbation. *This then is the Message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, That God is Light, and in him is no Darkness at all.* 'Tis in vain, therefore, for Man to fancy that the Sinner shall be dismissed, when he has paid the uttermost Farthing; that his Pain will be at an End, when he has satisfied Divine Justice by his Sufferings. Alas! When will this be? Who can estimate the Demerit and Provocation there is in Sin? But I have insisted on this very copiously before.

1 John 1. 5.

See the fifth Sermon upon this Text.

ally. Consider, That it is the Opinion of most, that Magistrates may propound what Penalty they please, to restrain their Subjects from the least as well as the greatest Offences, provided it be in their Power to restrain from them. If God then sets Life and Death before us, no Man can have reason to complain of him. If he chooses Death himself, the Wilfulness and Mad-ness of such a Choice is inexcusable, the Iniquity of the Will is extravagant and intolerable, especially if we consider, that the Terms on which Life is offer'd are gracious and equitable, and that every wilful

Vol. III. wilful Sin, how slight soever the Matter of it be, is a Contempt of God, and of his Threats and Promises.

If it be said, 'Tis true, a Law-giver may fortify his Laws with what Sanctions he pleases, if it be as easy for the Subject to obey as disobey, but it would be Tyrannical and Cruel, to enact severe Laws, and inflict great Penalties, where the Offence is slight in the Matter and Consequence of it, Obedience difficult, and Disobedience almost unavoidable. And this they count to be the Case here: But alas! this is a false Representation of Things. For I have shewn, that if our Propension to Sin be strong, God proportions his Assistance to our Necessity; if Temptations be great, the Rewards and Punishments of the Gospel do more than balance them. I have shewn you besides, that the Sins for which Men perish, are in their Nature great and provoking, and many in Number; and have therefore mention'd this Consideration to you, not because the Defence of my Subject needed it, but to shew you, that if Law-givers may justly punish small Sins, when voluntary and presumptuous, with great Evils; much more may God, without any Injustice, punish with a Hell, crying and enormous

enormous Sins wilfully committed, and **Sec. VII**
 impatiently persisted in to the Death.

3dly, Suppose a Hell be the natural and necessary Consequence of a wicked Life, what has the Sinner then to complain of? If Lewdness or Intemperance be here follow'd by Weakness, and Pain, and Deformity, What Ground has a Miserant to murmur against God, when under these Evils which he has brought upon himself? And may not the same Things be said concerning the Evils of a Future Life? If they be the natural and necessary Result of our Sins, What Ground have we to charge God with Injustice? If we be not meet for the Conversation of Saints in Light, if we have justly forfeited all Good, and have forsaken God who is the Fountain of it, With what Face can we, on this Supposition, quarrel at the Ways of God as unequal? Has he not forewarn'd us of this sad Event? Has he not done all that became his Wisdom and Goodness, to prevent it? Has he not born with us with much Long-suffering and Patience? Has he not testified the most tender Compassion for us, and a great Aversion to our Ruin and Misery? But the Day of Grace must be one time or other at an End: Mercy must not be extended
 for

Vol III. for Ever in vain; but the Wicked and Impenitent must, one time or other, eat of the Fruit of their own Way. Thus much may suffice to clear the Justice of Future Punishment; I proceed to shew, Secondly, That it is no ways inconsistent neither with the Wisdom of God. All that is said on this Head, is very wild and extravagant; it is measuring Divine Wisdom by our shallow and vain Faculties.

Sometimes it is ask'd, Why has God made Man thus? But as this is not altogether pertinent to the present Matter, it shall not be consider'd by me now. And it seems indeed to be a Question which ought never to be mov'd at all, or at least slighted when it is; because there is much Confidence and little Judgment in it.

But it is objected farther, That Punishment is either for the Reformation of the Offenders themselves, or the Discouragement of others; and if it serves not for one of these two Ends, it seems inconsistent with true Wisdom. Now neither of these Ends is aim'd at, nor can be pretended, in Eternal Punishment. To this I Answer, That Chastisements are indeed often inflicted, for the reclaiming of the Sinner; but when once the Sinner grows incorrigible,

or

or his Crimes enormous, all Law-givers in the World have thought it just and reasonable to punish such a one with Death; and all have ever granted, That Forgiveness must not be repeated perpetually; that Mercy and Grace must have an End; and that it can never consist with the Wisdom of Government to bear with those that are incurable.

Next, As to the Discouragement of others, this is a proper Reason enough for Punishment on this side the Day of Judgment, but can be none for any at all beyond it. For if the Day of Grace must have an End; if incorrigible Sinners must at length be cut off; 'tis plain, that this End must then cease. I know, some have thought, That there are, or may be other Worlds, which may be affected by that Future Punishment I am speaking of; but, I confess, I do not admire the advancing any Fancy in Religion; and all is Fancy, which has no Proof to support it. But I need not stick to affirm,

3. There is another Reason for Punishment, besides the two mentioned; and it is an obvious one, and universally granted, viz. The Demerit and Provocation there is in Sin. Sin deserves Punishment; there is a necessary Connexion

Vol. III. nexion between Guilt and Punishment.

Without this, Government could not consist; the Governor would bear the *Sword in vain*; and we should be more prone to condemn the Softness and Weakness of such a Governor, than magnify his Wisdom, or admire his Goodness. Tho' therefore God shou'd have no other End in punishing incorrigible and impenitent Sinners, but the Punishment it self, this were abundantly enough.

4. Future Punishment is the natural Consequence, as I have before shewn you, of our Sin. Death is the Sinner's Choice, and Eternal Misery the Result of his own Doings; he is not therefore to implead the Wisdom of God, but to detest his own Folly; for in every Sense his Destruction is truly of himself; and the various Methods God has taken to prevent and hinder it, are a glorious Manifestation of his Wisdom and Goodness.

Lastly, Tho' I have said thus much, to stop the Mouths of arrogant Sinners, I think 'tis more than needs; and that it is enough to silence any such Objection as this, That the Wisdom of God has a Depth we cannot fathom; that he has wise and just Reasons for what he does, when

we

we are far from being able to discover *Ser. VII.*
 'em, *How unsearchable are his Judge-*
ments, and his Ways past finding out! *Rom. 11.*
 33.

And thus I am come, in the last Place, to shew, that future Punishments (tho' they shou'd be such as we are commonly told they will) can be no Imputation on the Goodness of God. I have indeed said so much already, in the Prosecution of this Subject, upon this Head, that I can hardly think it needful to add any more. If God has done all that became Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, to prevent Man's Misery; if he extends Grace and Mercy as long as either can be of any Use: 'Tis plain that Man is to impute his Misery, not to God, but himself; and therefore here is no room to arraign Divine Goodness. This is a full Answer, in general to shew, That future Punishment is not inconsistent with the Goodness of God.

If it should be here said, That this the Sinner may grant, and yet may hope that the Goodness of God may oblige him to mitigate something of that Evil, which Man's own wilful Folly and Wickedness has brought upon him: I answer, I think no Man should go about to set Bounds to Divine Mercy, if God himself has not set 'em; but I am afraid,
 K if

Vol III. if we consult the *Scriptures*, we shall find that the Sinner has little Reason for such a Hope as this. For,

1. Does not the *Scripture* plainly represent this Life as the Day of Grace, and the other as the Day of Wrath? Does it not plainly tell us, That he
 Jam. 2. 13. shall have Judgment without Mercy, that hath shewed no Mercy? And it is much the same thing as to any other wilful Sin in which Men die impenitently. But,

2. Suppose God had reserv'd to himself a Liberty of exercising Prerogative Mercy in Hell, and had no where declar'd the contrary; yet what Reason would a wilful impenitent Sinner have now to hope, as I said before, that this would be extended to him. I would beseech such a one to consider these two Things.

First, We are plainly taught in
 Eph. 1. 7. *Scripture*, that the *Gospel* contains the
 ——— 2. 7. Riches of the Glory of the Grace of
 Col. 1. 27. God, all the Treasures of Divine Mercy and Goodness. Who then dares promise himself more Mercy than God has promis'd in the *Gospel*? What Motive can we think may engage God to deal thus mercifully with Sinners in the Day of Wrath? May any Change be wrought

in the Damnd? Or are there any more Sen. VII.
 meritorious Sacrifices to be hop'd for,
 than that of the Son of God?

Secondly, Let those who expect Pre-
 rogative Mercy will be exercis'd to-
 wards the Damp'd, consider, That
 the Indignation of God against Sin
 is as just as it is great; that it
 is founded in his Nature, and there-
 fore is unalterable; that Eternal
 Death is due to Sin; that this
 Judgment of God against Sinners is
 most righteous; and *lastly*, that no
 lesser Sacrifice than the Blood of
Christ was sufficient to atone for the
 Sins of the World.

To all that I have said, I will add
 this one Consideration more: When
 we find God expressly declaring against
 this very Presumption, and letting
 the Sinner know, that it would cer-
 tainly increase his Punishment, What
 more effectual Way could he take to
 preclude and convince Man of the
 Folly and Madness of it? And yet
 this is done, both here in my Text,
 and elsewhere: *And it come to pass*
when he heareth the Words of this
Curse, that he bless himself in his
Heart, saying, I shall have Peace,
though I walk in the Imagination of
mine

Vol. III. mine Heart, to add Drunkenness to Thrift. And then it follows in the next Verse, The Lord will not spare him, but then the Anger of the Lord, and his Jealousy shall smoke against that Man, and all the Curses that are written in this Book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his Name from under Heaven. What can be plainer to this Purpose, than those Words of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans? *Ch. 2. 4, 5.* Despise thou the Riches of his Goodness, and Forbearance, and Long-suffering, not knowing that the Goodness of God leadeth thee to Repentance? But after thy Hardness and impenitent Heart, treasurest up unto thy self Wrath against the Day of Wrath, and Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God. From whence we are clearly taught these three Things; First, That this Presumption is virtually a Contempt of the Divine Goodness. Secondly, That it implies a gross Ignorance of the Design of God's Long-suffering towards Sinners. And Lastly, That it will in effect prove nothing else but an Increase of Pain and Misery in Eternity.

In a word, That no Man might fancy that the Judgments of God denounced

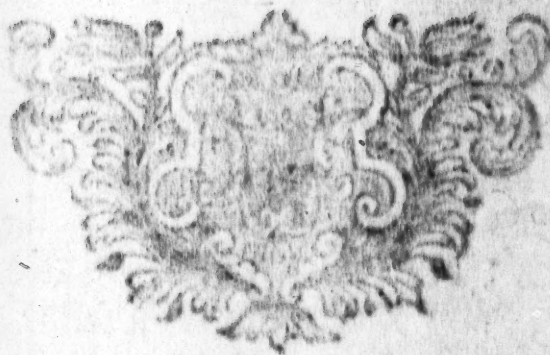
nounced against Sin, do favour of an Ser.VII.
arbitrary and unreasonable Severity, 
God lets us know that he is averie
to our Damnation, that Cruelty is
repugnant to his Nature, that we
necessitate and compel him to what-
ever he shall inflict upon us; for he
earnestly desires that we should live, Ezek. 18.
he is forward to forgive Iniquity, and 23.
Transgression, and Sin, slow to Anger, Exod. 34.
and delights in Acts of Grace and 7.
Mercy. Jer. 9. 14.

The End of the Seventh Sermon.



announced against him, do favour of an
 arbitrary and unreasonable severity,
 and let us know that he is averse
 to our Damnation, that Cruelty is
 repugnant to his Nature, that we
 incite and compel him to what
 ever he shall incline upon us, for he
 actually desires that we should be
 he is forward to forgive Iniquity, and
 Transgression, and has said, how to
 and delights in Acts of Grace and
 Mercy.

The End of the Second Sermon.

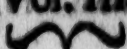


SERMON VIII.

The Folly and Danger of delaying Repentance.

H. E. B. III. 7.

Wherefore as the Holy Ghost saith, To Day if ye will hear his Voice,

I Am well satisfied, that more Vol. III. 
perish by Negligence and
Presumption, than by all
other Things put together;
that more perish by procras-
tinating and delaying Repentance, than by
Atheism and Infidelity, of what sort so-
ever. There are but few, I hope, ve-
ry few, who deny the Being of a God,
a Holy God, and a Judgment to come:
There are but few who are able to look
upon the Gospel of Christ, which is sup-
ported and establish'd by Predictions and
Miracles, by the incomparable Purity
K 4 of

Vol. III. of its Doctrine, by the Resurrection of *Jesus*, by the Holiness and Blood of Apostles and Martyrs; there are but few, I say, who dare as much as pretend to examine and baffle these Arguments, and consequently who look upon the Gospel as a *cunningly-devis'd Fable*: But, on the other side, How many are they that profess the Gospel, and yet walk no way suitable to it? How many are they who believe a GOD, a Mediator, and a Judgment to come; and yet live as ill, and act as unreasonably, as if they were under the Power of Darkness and Infidelity?

Whence does this come to pass? Do not Men know that Sin is a State of Danger? Do they not know that the *Wrath of God is reveal'd from Heaven against all Ungodliness, and Unrighteousness of Men*? Do they not know that this Wrath is founded in the Holiness of the Divine Nature, for *God is Light, and in him is no Darkness at all*? Or do they know these Doctrines only in general, and have they never brought them home to themselves by any close Application? Have they never been convinced of the Danger of their own State in particular? Have their Consciences never been awaken'd? Have they

they never been alarm'd by guilty Dread Sermon and Terror? This is very hard to be imagin'd in a Church where the *Word of God* is so constantly read, where it is preach'd with so much Plainness and Power, where the Liturgy it self, from the beginning to the end of it, does so movingly inculcate Faith and Repentance; and finally, where there are so many Treatises written not only clear and strong, solid and argumentative, but devout and affectionate too. What then? Can we think that Men can be convinced, and yet not concern'd? Can we think that Self-Love and Fear are so utterly extinguish'd in them, that they are able to defie Almighty Vengeance, out-brave endless Torments, and reconcile themselves to *Everlasting Burnings*? No, No; this cannot be: Therefore I must conclude that this is the one general Way by which Men calm and allay the Fears and Distractions of Conscience, namely, by fooling themselves with Promises of future Repentance. They cannot think that the Wrath of God is to be contemned; but yet they think they may a-while presume upon his Goodness. They dare not say that Sin is not odious and provoking to him; but they think it is
time

Vol. III. time enough to leave it yet. They cannot believe that Repentance is not necessary; but they think it is not necessary immediately, and that they shall do well enough if they repent hereafter; and therefore they purpose to do so one time or other.

This is the Case of too too many; and God knows whether it be not the Case of many that hear me this Day, and have heard me for many Years together. I one while assert the Truth of the *Gospel* in general, another while expound and confirm the great Doctrines of it: Sometimes I lay open the Wiles and Artifices of the Devil, and at other times I endeavour to discover the Sinner to himself, and shew him all the Artifice and Sophistry by which his Lust imposes upon him. I reprove, rebuke, exhort, and beseech; I address my self to your Reason and your Passions; but with what Effect, after all, God alone knows. I do not discern any mighty Matter done, I do not hear of any great Reformation wrought. I have reason therefore to fear lest you deceive yourselves the same way too which Sinners generally do, and so defeat all my Endeavours, by this one wretched Project, of Repenting hereafter.

To

To prevent this, I have pitch'd upon *Second* these Words, *Wherefore as the Holy* **VIII.**
Ghost saith, To Day if ye will hear his
Voice.

They are taken out of the 95th Psalm and 7th Verse. The Scope and Design of them is plain enough, namely, to exhort Christians to make use of the Day of Grace and Salvation, lest if they harden their Hearts against the Calls of GOD, from time to time, as the Children of Israel did in the Wilderness, they should, like them, perish in their Sins, and never enter into *Canaan*, the Rest promis'd them.

The Doctrine which I shall observe from them, and which I shall endeavour to imprint upon your Hearts, shall be this, That when a Sinner is convinced of the Evil and Danger of his State, he ought not to delay his Repentance, but to set about it immediately. Now to perswade you to this, I shall lay before you these several Things.

I. That Repentance is a Work of the greatest Importance. 'Tis on this, and this alone, on which the true Good, the true Happiness of a Man depends.

II. That

Vol. III

II. 'Tis a Work which cannot be accomplished without Time and Pains; it is not to be done easily, and in a Moment.

III. I shall shew you, That he who delays his Repentance, does act very disingeniously and foolishly, even tho' he shoud actually Repent hereafter. But that,

IV. The Design of Repenting hereafter, is liable to so many Uncertainties, that one would think no Man of Sense should be willing to hazard his present and future Happiness upon it.

I. That Repentance is a Work of the highest Importance. If this be true, you must needs grant me, that which I contend for, That it ought not to be put off or neglected on the Account of any other Business, but that it deserves the first Place; that it justly challenges our first and greatest Care. But that this is true, is plain to every Man that knows what Repentance is. To Repent, is to become Wise and Good; it is to turn to GOD from the Creature, and consequently

quently to pass out of a State of Wrath, *Sermon VIII.*
into a State of Grace and Favour.

First, Then (to treat these separately) let us consider Repentance as a Means of procuring God's Favour.

I am not now addressing my self to Athiests or to Infidels, but to Christians; to such as call themselves by the Name of *Christ*, profess the Belief and Worship of the God and Father of our Lord *Jesus*, who sit before him here as his People, and delight to hear his Word, and make a publick Profession of owning the Gospel of *Jesus* as this Word. I need not therefore prove to you, That to secure your selves of the Favour, and escape the Wrath of God, is your great, indeed your only Interest; or that Repentance is the only Way to do this. I need not demonstrate to you, That there is a Judgment to Come, a Heaven and a Hell; the one a State of endless Misery, the other of endless Happiness; or, That Repentance is the only way to escape the one, and obtain the other; on which Supposition it is, that our Saviour resolves, That an Universal Monarchy over the whole habitable World, is not in the least able to balance or make amends for the loss of the Soul. *What is a Man profited, Mar. 10. 26.*
if he shall gain the whole World, and lose his

Vol. III. *his own Soul? Or what shall a Man give in exchange for his Soul? These Things, I say, you, as Christians, must be persuaded of, That nothing but true Repentance can intitle us to the Favour of God; and, That without Repentance, we must be miserable, and that for Ever.*

Ecclu. 16.
11, 12.

It is in vain to flatter our selves with the Goodness of God; he is Holy as well as Good, Just as well as Merciful. To this purpose are those Words of the wise Son of Sirach, Mercy and Wrath are with him; he is mighty to forgive, and to pour out Displeasure. As his Mercy is great, so is his Correction also; he judgeth a Man according to his Works. Now the Goodness of God is abundantly manifested, by his giving his Son to die for the World, by his tendering Mercy to those that repent, by his promising the Assistance of his Spirit, and by his accepting our sincere Obedience, how imperfect and defective soever it be. But how will his Holiness be manifested? How will his Justice be asserted, if he pardon and crown the Impenitent? How can he be said to judge Men according to their Works, if he do not punish wilful and obstinate Sinners?

Mat. 16.
27.
Rev. 20.
13.

It is in vain, in the next Place, to flatter our selves with the Sufferings and Merits

Merits of Christ; because, tho' these Sermon
can never be estimated sufficiently, yet **VIII.**
there is nothing plainer thorough the
whole Gospel than this, That none shall
reap any Benefit from 'em, but those
that believe and repent. For in the
Commission our Lord gave the Apostles to
preach the Gospel, Faith and Repentance
are inseparably join'd with Remission
of Sins thro' his Name. And
St. John tells us plainly, That if we walk
in the Light, then, and not otherwise,
have we Fellowship with God; for God
is Light, and in him is no Darknes at all.
And then, and not otherwise, shall the
Blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanse us
from all Sin.

Mat. 28.

19.

Mark 16.

15, 16.

Luke 24.

47.

1 John 1.

5, 6, 7.

In vain, lastly, should any Sinner flatter
himself, That the Misery of another
Life will either not be intolerable, or
not endless; for the Scripture tells us,
That the Wicked shall go away into Ever-
lasting Punishment. The Soul of Man is
immortal, the Day of Grace ends with this
Life, there remains no more Sacrifice for
Sins; Sin is the Object of God's Wrath,
and the Wrath of God must differ vastly
from that of a frail and impotent Man;
according to that of our Saviour, Fear
not them which kill the Body, but are not
able to kill the Soul; but rather fear him
which

Mat. 25.

46.

John 9. 4.

Heb. 10.

26.

Mat. 10.

28.

Vol. III. which is able to destroy both Soul and Body in Hell. This, Reason, and this the Gospel teaches us, and from hence follows all that I have laid down. Certainly then, if I consider you as Christians, as Men who believe, That a Holy God cannot but hate Sin, and prosecute it with Wrath and Indignation; That consequently, nothing but Repentance can reconcile him to us: You must conclude, That Repentance is the most important Work of Man, and therefore ought to be his first and immediate one; That it ought not to be postpon'd for Matters comparatively trifling, much less for Sins and the Gratifications of our Lusts, which must ever render a Sinner's Case more and more desperate.

But let us, in the Second Place, consider Repentance, as it signifies the becoming Wise and Good. If I was to address my self to you only as Men, you must disclaim the Title of Rational Creatures, if you will not own, that Knowledge and Understanding, Wisdom and Virtue, are Matters of the highest Moment. For since Virtue (as Tully, * in his Treatise

* Est autem Virtus nihil aliud, quam in se perfecta, & ad summum perducta Natura. Cicero de Leg. lib. 1. cap. 8.

de Legibus, tells us) is nothing else but Sermon
 Nature improv'd and cultivated, per- VIII.
 fect'd and accomplish'd, we may as well
 debate, whether the Health and Strength
 of the Body be a Matter of the highest
 Moment; whether it import a Man high-
 ly to be in his Wits, to be the Master of
 himself and Actions, to be possess'd of
 inward Peace and Content, as we may
 debate whether it do most nearly con-
 cern a Man to be Wise and Virtuous.
 For to be Wise and Virtuous, is nothing
 else but to enrich the Understanding
 with useful and solid Truths, to assert
 the true Liberty of Man's Will, that it
 may be able always to follow the Dictates
 of Reason, i. e. that the Man, being
 freed from Ignorance and Error, and
 from the Tyranny of every sinful and
 mischievous Lust, may be able to chuse
 what is best for him, and act consonant
 to his true Interest; the natural and im-
 mediate Effect of which is Peace and
 Contentment of Mind, and generally
 Health and Strength of Body, with
 Prosperity and Tranquility in our Af-
 fairs. Repentance then is that true Wis-
 dom to which *Solomon*, in the *Proverbs*,
 and elsewhere, attributes such glorious
 Effects, and which he describes by such
 lovely Characters; *Who so hearkeneth*
 L unto

Vol. III. unto me, shall dwell safely, and shall be
 Prov. 1. 33. quiet from fear of Evil. — When Wis-
 dom entreteth into thine Heart, and Know-
 ledge is pleasant unto thy Soul, Discre-
 tion shall preserve thee, Understanding
 shall keep thee. — Happy is the Man
 that findeth Wisdom, and the Man that
 getteth Understanding. For the Merchan-
 dise of it is better than the Merchandise
 of Silver, and the Gain thereof than fine
 Gold. She is more precious than Rubies,
 and all the things thou canst desire, are
 not to be compared unto her. Length of
 Days is in her Right Hand, and in her
 Left Hand Riches and Honour. Her
 Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all
 her Paths are Peace. She is a Tree of
 Life to them that lay hold upon her: and
 happy is every one that retaineth her.
 Now since this is the Fruit of Wisdom
 and Virtue, and since by Repentance, I
 mean nothing else but the Attainment of
 these, I leave any One to judge whether
 this be not a Business that deserves our
 first Considerations, and earliest Endeavours.

If our Natures be transform'd into the
 Divine Image, and we receiv'd into the
 Favour of GOD, 'tis plain, there is no
 Good that we may not hope for. What is
 it that GOD cannot do for us? What is
 it

it that he cannot bestow upon us? What Sermon will not Love effect, when it is endow'd **VIII.** with Almighty Power and an Unerring Wisdom? Nor is there any Evil that we need fear, the worst that can befall us may be converted into Good, or however this be, it is sure to be abundantly outweigh'd by Blessings both in Possession and Reversion. But if our Natures be deprav'd, and God disclaim and forsake us, whatever Good we possess, becomes a Curse; or if it do not, 'tis lighter and emptier than a Bubble, compar'd to that dreadful Weight of Evils which hover over us. What Madness then is it to reject and postpone the Care of our most important Interest, and be busy and solicitous about Trifles? We can't be guilty of this, but through want of Integrity, or want of Sense: We are either infatuated, and do not discern where our true and great Interest lies; or else we maintain a good Understanding with the Enemy; we are brib'd and corrupted by some devilish, silly, destructive Lust. It is not indeed unusual to see Men preferring the slightest to the most important Matters, but then 'tis when they promise themselves, that this will have no ill Influence, or, it may be, some good one, on their own private Interest: But that

Vol. III ever Men should want Integrity towards themselves, that they should combine with their Enemy against their own Interest, that they should be so far infatuated as not to see it, and so fond of that Infatuation as not to endure to be disabus'd and undeceiv'd; this exceeds all Wonder; and yet this is the Case of every One who delays his Repentance, and makes this his first and chiefest Business give way to his carnal Pleasures or worldly Cares. For every Sinner that does so, lives in a World full of most terrible Dangers, and yet puts off the Thoughts of his own Safety; he is in a State of Poverty and Nakedness, and yet respites the Care of Provision and a Maintenance: He is Weak and Sick; sick, not of a loathsom only, but deadly Disease, and yet postpones all Considerations and Endeavours for his Health: He is, in a word, subject to the Wrath of God, and obnoxious to an Eternal Hell; and yet puts off the Thoughts of Reconciliation to Years to come; and in the mean time falls presently on the Project of Wealth or Pleasure, and busies himself about the Affairs of a short and transitory Life.

II. Repen-

Sermon
VIII.

II. Repentance is a Work that requires Time and Pains, and is not to be perform'd easily and in a Moment. Were Repentance but a single Act of Sorrow, were it design'd only to begin a Reformation, but never to effect one; were it to consist in uncertain Fits and Returns of Remorse and Regret: Then, I must confess, there cou'd be no great Necessity of entring upon it speedily; for a Change either in our Fortune or in our Temper, a serious Humour, or a fit of Melancholy; the Emptiness of our sensual Satisfaction, or the Disappointment of a sinful Project; the mischievous Consequence of some Lust, or at least Sickness and Danger, would be sure to produce this sort of Repentance, one time or other. But alas! the Repentance I am pressing you to, is a Thing of another Nature: 'Tis the *New Creature*, the Divine Image, the Life of Christ in Man; and the Fruits of it, are, Stedfastness and Fervency, Joy and Peace in the Practice of Religion, Support, Comfort, and Hope in the Hour of Death, an humble Confidence in the Day of Judgment, and then Triumph and Glory.

Now that to attain to all this is not an easy Task, the Work of an Hour or of a Day,
L 3 you

Vol. III. you may, I believe, be soon convinced by the Experience of Mankind. To subdue a Lust, to correct and reform Nature in any one Instance, to extirpate an Evil Habit, ah ! What Watchfulness and Discipline does it require ? I appeal to you yourselves, How often have you repented of, how often have you resolv'd, how often have you pray'd, strove, and bound yourselves by a solemn Sacrament, against this or that Sin, and yet fallen back to it again ? Ah ! how slow is your Progress towards a compleat Conquest over your Sins ? A strict and impartial Inquiry into the Success of your last Year's Warfare, will easily inform you of this. What Victories have you gain'd ? What Trophies have you rais'd ? What natural or contracted Lust have you mortified ? Those that were Proud or Vain, Are they not so still ? The Wilful and Passionate, Are they not Wilful and Passionate still ? And so, I fear, I might go on : And yet I must tell you, That to *cease to do Evil*, is but the beginning of Repentance ; 'tis but the first and lowest step of Righteousness. To *do Good*, to *put on Christ*, to *walk as he walk'd*, to live by Faith, to be inflam'd with the Love of God, and to have our *Conversation in Heaven*, to be meek and poor

in Spirit, and pure in Heart, i. e. to Sermon
 despise this World, and long for a bet- VIII.
 ter; this a farther Degree of Repen-
 tance which we must come up to, called, 
 in the Prophet *Isaiah*, the *learning to do* Ch. 1. 17.
well; and by St. Paul, the *perfecting* 2 Cor. 7. 1.
Holiness in the Fear of God. And how
 hard a Task this is, appears sufficiently
 from hence, That we do all in general
 strive to debase Religion, and bring it
 down to a Compliance with our Inclina-
 tions, and a Conformity to the Humours
 and Modes of the World. And tho' all
 the Professors of Christianity seem to
 be convinced of the Truth and Advan-
 tages of it; yet how few are they that
 live up to their Faith, and act consonant
 to this Perswasion? How few are they,
 in whose Life and Conversation there
 does appear any Proofs or Evidences of
 this *Perfection of Holiness*? And yet
 'tis almost as possible to hide and con-
 ceal the Sun in its Brightness, as to smo-
 ther and stifle Virtue so as it shall not
 display its self in a Thousand Instances:
Out of the abundance of the Heart, (saith
 our Lord,) *the Mouth speaketh*. It is
 impossible, that a Man's Principles shou'd
 not discover themselves in his Words and
 Actions; or that the Virtue which im-
 pregnates his Affections, which influences

Mat. 12.
34

Vol. III. and regulates the whole course of Life, should not appear in most Things which he says or does. If this Divine Life, this Heavenly Light, do reign and shine within, it will diffuse and scatter it self thro' all the Parts of our Behaviour and Conversation; it will add Charms to our Speech, and Beauty to our Life; our Designs, our Enjoyments, our Business, our Diversions, our Prosperity, and our Adversity; all we say, or do, or suffer, will have a particular Grace and Loveliness in it, and Virtue will shine and sparkle in every Passage of our Life and Fortune.

But whether this be so or no, whether the Power of Godliness do indeed reign in the World, the uncommonness of another sort of *Fruits* of it will easily inform us; I mean those of *Joy* and *Peace*, Delight and Pleasure in the Practice of Religion, or Reflexion upon it, with a Tranquility and unmoy'd Constancy, or Greatness of Mind in Adversity, or Death it self. Alas! I fear, these are Things discours'd of as Speculations, or as Heights and Excellencies peculiar to the first Times of Christianity.

The Result therefore of what I have said under this Head, amounts to this,
That

That if a true and thorough Repentance Sermon be a Work of much Difficulty, if it require much Travail and much Time; VIII.
then it can't be fit to put it off to our spare and leisure Hours, or to our declining and broken Years. But the Unreasonableness of this way of acting will appear plainer yet, from my

III^d. Head, where I propos'd to shew, That tho' we were sure of Repenting hereafter; yet even then it would be acting both disingenuously and foolishly to delay the doing it now.

1st. It is acting disingenuously. When we consider the Love of GOD to Mankind, when we reflect upon the Sufferings of Jesus; we cannot but be convinced, that the Obedience and Service of the whole Life, is too poor a Return to such astonishing Obligations, if we had any better to make; and therefore a Person of an ingenuous and generous Temper wou'd rather do more than is required from him if he cou'd, than fall short if he might. If we had any Gratitude, we should blush to think of offering up to GOD, and to our dear Lord, the broken Fragments of our Time, and the Dregs of our Life and Strength.

Nor

Vol. III. Nor is this all; such is the Crown,  such is the Heaven which GOD bestows upon his Servants, that had it been propos'd as the Reward of the Trials and Sufferings of some thousands of Years, it would have infinitely outweigh'd them all; and now that the Life of Man is but Threescore Years and Ten, Can it consist with any Sense of Modesty, to refuse the best part of these Years to the obtaining this Heaven? This sure must argue a strange undervaluing of Heaven, or a very arrogant over-valuing of our own Service.

But this, it may be, is a very faint and cold Argument; we have not, I fear, so nice and delicate a Sense of Honour and Generosity, of Gratitude and Ingenuity, as to be much affected by this Topic. I therefore pass on to Reflexions of a keener Edge and stronger Temper, and assert,

2dly, That this cannot become a Wise and Rational Man; because,

1. The Continuance in Sin, renders a much severer Repentance necessary to expiate and atone our Guilt.

2. It forfeits Degrees of Glory. And,

3. It prolongs a Man's Misery, and delays his Happiness.

1. It

1. It renders a much feverer Repen- Sermon
tance necessary to expiate and atone our VIII.
Guilt. He that is to account for the
Sins of many Years, is certainly a deeper Debtor than he who clear'd off his Accounts betimes. For besides the Excess of Time, it commonly happens, that the first Years of Sinners are the more innocent. They are kept back by Impressions of Civil Education, by Modesty and Timorousness, and by the natural Tenderness of Conscience; so that they venture upon Sin but now and then, when attacked by some extraordinary Accident or Temptation; and even then they resolve upon it with Reluctancy, commit it with Modesty, and end it with Remorse and Regret: But when, thro' the Assistance of Time, and Frequency, they have thrown off these Restraints, then they sin without Reluctancy or Sorrow, and are carried smoothly away by an uncontroll'd Torrent of debauch'd Affections, and Life is but one constant Course of Sin: So that the Man, who has liv'd long thus, must have amass'd together strange Heaps of Sin; and the Guilt of them increases in Proportion to their Number. For tho' 'tis true, these Men do at last commonly arrive at a Perfection of Sinning,
without

Vol. III. without Trouble or Disquiet of Mind; yet alas! all Acts which are consequent to a Habit, carry with them all the Guilt of that Evil Habit, so that all that Grace they rejected, all that Goodness they despis'd e're they could arrive at that Habit of Sin, is anew rejected and despis'd in every Act of Sin consequent of that Habit. Sin is like a Disease, the stronger the Nature is which it assaults, the greater is the Anguish which it creates us; and therefore, we are not to account it the less fatal, because the Pain dies together with our Strength. And if this be the Case of every Sinner who hath continued long in his Sin, if the Number and the Guilt of his Sins be naturally increas'd by his Continuance in them; it is but rational to suppose, that the Atonement of them must be the more difficult. Our remaining Years will hardly furnish us with Hours enough for Prayers and Tears, with Days enough for Fasting and Affliction: What a Folly then is it in any Man to be willing to continue a little longer in his Sins? since this is plainly to multiply his Sorrows and his Fears, to increase the Anguish and Distress of his Soul in the Day of his Repentance, and to reduce himself under the Necessity

sity of chastising his Soul with greater Sermon
Bitterness and Severity than otherwise **VIII**
he would be oblig'd to. Poor Soul! 
who e'er thou art, who do'st resolve to
continue yet a little longer in thy Sins,
give me leave to tell thee, If thou
couldst behold thy self with the same Eyes
now, thou wilt do in the Day of thy Re-
pentance; if thou hadst the same Thoughts
of Sin now, thou wilt have in that
Day, thou wouldst never desire to have
thy Wounds deeper, thy Soul more cri-
minal, thy Sin more provoking, and thy
State more dangerous than 'tis this Day.
I doubt it will be to little purpose to put
a Sinner in mind,

2. That by delaying Repentance, he
does, in all probability, forfeit some De-
grees of Happiness and Glory in the
other World. Tho' he be very ambi-
tious as to this World, he is modest
enough with reference to the other;
and he that does not think himself hap-
py Here, unless he be richer and greater
than his Neighbour, is content enough
to think of the lowest Place and Rank
in Heaven. Shall I call this Humility?
I doubt, 'tis rather Infidelity; and yet,
methinks, if Men did not believe, they
would not so much as purpose to Repent
hereafter, because they would not discern
any

Vol. III. any Necessity for it at all. But if it be not Infidelity, I am sure, 'tis Folly; for if we believe Heaven to be a State of that Happiness we pretend, all the Pleasures upon Earth are too light to be set in the Balance against one Grain of it; and that Man must be concluded to have a very faint and imperfect Notion of the Bliss of Heaven, who is not desirous of as much of it as he can get: Nor is it Humility in any Man, but Ignorance and Folly not to be willing to be as happy as he can. But suppose a late Repentance were not to be more severe than an early one, and suppose it would entitle the Penitent to as good a Share of Happiness and Glory in Heaven; yet still longer Continuance in Sin is Folly; because,

3. Sin is really a State of Misery, and Virtue of Happiness; so that to delay one's Repentance, is to delay one's Happiness; and to prolong one's Sin, is to prolong one's Misery. That Men fancy I know not what Severity and Bitterness in the one, and I know not what Pleasure in the other, is to be imputed to the Corruption and Debauchery of their Judgments. If these Men would but follow the Advice of the Psalmist,

Psal. 34. 8. if they would but *taste and see how Good the Lord is*, i. e. how kind his Commands,

mands, and how rich his Rewards; they Sermon
would no more deliberate whether it be **VIII.**
time enough to repent, than whether it
be time enough to be happy. Thus the
Apostle appeals for the Decision of this
Point to the very Experience of such
who had been Sinners, but were then
Converts; *What Fruit had ye then in Rom. 6.21.*
those Things whereof ye are now asha-
med? For the end of those Things is
Death. Good God! if there be no
Fruit in Sin, even when we commit it,
and if *the Wages of it be Shame and Ver. 23.*
Death, What makes us fond of continu-
ing in this State? And if, on the other
hand, *the Ways of Wisdom are Ways of Prov. 3.17.*
Pleasantness, and all her Paths Peace,
What should make us afraid of being too
soon Wise and Virtuous? And surely,
it does not require much Pains to prove,
That to have our Minds enlighten'd,
our Hearts purified, our whole Soul
calm, and cheerful, and full of Hopes,
to be the *Children of God,* and Heirs of
Heaven, to be the Charge and Care of
the Divine Providence, the Pupils and
Disciples of the Divine Spirit, is a State
of Pleasure and Happiness.

From all therefore that has been said
on this Head, it does appear, that, for
One convinced of the Evil and Danger
of

Vol. III. of Sin, to delay and put off Repentance, is no way consistent with Ingenuity or Wisdom, even on supposal that he should one time or other actually repent. But if all this move not, then consider,

IV. How uncertain it is, whether this Project, of Repenting hereafter, ever come to be put in execution. This will easily appear,

1st. From the Increase of the Difficulty of Repentance.

2^{dly}, From the Uncertainty of God's Procedure towards the Presumptuous Sinner.

1st. The Difficulty of Repentance is increas'd. Now, that 'tis the Difficulty of Reformation, that tempts the Sinner to delay it, that it is an Aversion to Virtue, which tempts him to continue a little longer in his Sin, is undeniable; for if the State of Righteousness, which is a State of Safety and Pleasure, was a State too attainable with Ease, it were morally impossible but that every Rational Man should presently enter into it. But if the Sinner be discouraged now, What reason have we to imagine that he will certainly repent when the Difficulty is greater, and the Aversion stronger? I will therefore take
a short

a short View of that State into which Sermon the Sinner betrays himself, by continuing in Impenitence; which, I should think, should make him tremble, to see how much more improbable his Repentance grows every Day one than another. In order to this, let us examine,

1. How hard it is to convince such a Man's Understanding.

2. If this was done, how hard it is still to beget in him Concern and Solitude, Sorrow and Anguish of Mind.

3. We will suppose this done too, and shew you how hard it is, even then, for an Habitual Sinner to break off his Sin, and effect a thorough Change in himself, *i. e.* not only a Trouble for having sinn'd, but a Hatred and Loathing of Sin; not only a Desire to escape Punishment, and to obtain Heaven, but the Love of God and Goodness.

1. then, We are to enquire, How difficult it is to convince the Understanding of a Man that is grown old in Sin, of the *Error of his Ways*. Vice does by Degrees undermine the very Principles of Virtue; it clouds and darkens the Understanding, and brings the Sinner at length to a *Reprobate Mind*, an undistinguishing Judgment, *that calls*
M Evil

Vol. III. *Evil Good, and Good Evil.* Thus the Ambitious Man calls his Sin Greatness of Mind; the Covetous thinks his Prudence; the Luxurious calls his Generosity; and the Lustful thinks he has found out true Happiness, laughs at the Anxieties and Cares of busy and designing Men as mere Folly, and the Virtues and Mortifications, the Faith and Devotion of the Religious as either Pretences and Shams, or Whimsy and Enthusiasm, or, at best, but nice and doubtful Speculations. These are they who

Eph. 4. 19. are describ'd in the Scripture as past
 1 Tim. 4. 2. feeling, having their Hearts callous and
 Rom. 1. 32. fat, *their Consciences sear'd with a hot Iron, working all Uncleanness with Greediness, and taking Pleasure in them that do so.* This is the Description the Evangelist gives us of the Israelites; and in them is fulfill'd the Prophecy of Esaias, which saith, *By hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive: For this Peoples Heart is waxed gross, and their Ears are dull of hearing, and their Eyes have they clos'd; lest at any time they should see with their Eyes, and hear with their Ears, and should understand with their Heart, and should be converted, and*

I should

I should beat them. So that the Dis-Sermon
 courses of our Lord himself had very **VIII.**
 little Success amongst these. Tho' he
 spake as never Man spake, who he liv'd **Joh. 7. 46.**
 as never Man liv'd, and wrought such
 Works as astonish'd them. All how
 hard was it for him to convince a fottish
 voluptuous Sadducee of a Resurrection; a
 proud Pharisee of the Necessity of internal
 Spiritual Righteousness, Poverty of Spi-
 rit, and Purity of Heart, Sorrow for Sin,
 and an universal Charity? But suppose
 you cou'd convince a Sinner, That God
 is holy, that his Law is so too; that
 Sin is a Transgression of this Law;
 that the Wages of Sin is Death; and
 that there is very suddenly a Judgment
 to come; yet,

2. How hard will it be to beget in
 him those Passions which are previous
 and preparatory to a true and thorough
 Repentance, viz. Trouble and Solitude
 of Mind, Fear, Shame, and Sorrow?
 Alas! he has been accustomed to despise
 Reason, to stifle Conscience, to resist
 Calls: He is dead in Trespasses and Sins;
 and it is hard to beget in him any signs
 of Life. Does not the Prophet com- **Jer. 5.**
 plain of such, that they are stupid
 and insensible, incapable of Shame; that
 they have an Aversion for what is good;

Vol. III. that they have made their Faces harder than a Rock; that they are sottish Children? And therefore he looks upon their State as desperate, and thinks but very few capable of any Benefit from the clearest and loudest Warning: For my

Jer. 4. 22. People is foolish; they have not known me; they are sottish Children, and they have none Understanding; they are wise to do Evil, but to do Good they have no know-

Ch. 6. 10. ledge. — To whom shall I speak and give Warning, that they may hear? Behold, their Ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: Behold, the Word of the Lord is unto them a Reproach; they have no Delight in it. But,

3. Suppose these preparatory Passions or Dispositions wrought in a Sinner; yet there remains much more to be done: These are but the Dawnings of the Spiritual Day, the Throws and Pangs of the New-birth, the Beginnings of Repentance: A Man must not only be troubled and sorry for Sin, but he must break it off; he must not only be pierced with Fear and Anguish, but he must come to hate Sin, and love Righteousness, or else it cannot be said, that a thorough Change is wrought in the Mind.

And

And this is a Consideration which looks Sermon
 with a very dreadful Aspect upon a very VIII.
 Late or Death-bed Repentance. I doubt, 
 they who presume much upon it, do not
 form a true Notion of Repentance; they
 think it consists barely in Conviction,
 in recovering their Wits, and in a few
 short Acts made up of Fear and Self-con-
 demnation: But alas! there goes much
 more to constitute a Change of Heart
 and Life; we must not only confess Sin,
 but forsake it; we must not only be trou-
 bled for Sin, but hate it; we must not
 only resolve upon doing Good, but love
 it, and delight in it. Now, 'tis easy
 for us, from this Notion of Repentance,
 which I am sure is a Scripture one, to
 conclude, what a doubtful, melancholy
 State Men reduce themselves to, by put-
 ting off Repentance till the last. For
 it is a difficult Work, even after a Man
 is convinced that Sin is evil, to break it
 off. A Man may be convinced, that *the*
Commandment is holy, and just, and good; Rom. 7. 12.
 and yet be so sensual and earthy, as to
 be far enough from loving and delight-
 ing in it; Nay, a Man may come to
 will and desire that which is good, and
 yet have no Power to do it, because of
 the Dominion which natural and habi-
 tual Corruption has over him. A Man,

Vob. II. like Felix, may tremble at the preaching of
 Acts 24, 25. *Righteousness, Temperance, and Judgment
 to come*; and yet may dismiss the Argu-
 ment, and be far enough from proceed-
 ing to a true Reformation. In a Word,
 a Man may have warm and brisk Passions
 rais'd in him, and yet they may soon
 grow cold, soon vanish; and so the
 Goodness of such a one may be like a
*Morning Cloud, and as the early Dew that
 goeth away.*

What I have said on this last Head is
 this: There is a great Difference be-
 tween Conviction and Reformation; be-
 tween Fear and Remorse for Sin, and an
 Abhorrence and Hatred of it; and be-
 tween the Desire and Purpose of be-
 coming Good, and really being so, or a
 sincere Love of, and Delight in Good-
 ness: The one may indeed be effected
 in a Moment, but the other is generally
 the Work of Time; the one may, in
 some Circumstances at least, be produced
 in us easily, but the other not without
 Labour and Pain, Diligence and Vigi-
 lance, Self-denial and Prayer.

Will any here object; Will no less a
 Degree of Repentance, than this avail?
 Will Preparations and Dispositions to it
 signify nothing with God? To this I
 answer, I cannot pretend to understand
 the

the Mind of God farther than he has reveal'd it : This is the Repentance to which the *Scripture* promises Life ; and I dare not promise it to any other. God does sometimes exercise a Prerogative Mercy ; but who dares assure a Sinner of it ? Nay, I have reason to doubt, whether there be not some few Cases only, that are proper Subjects of it, and some wherein God has prevented the Expectation of it by expresse Declarations to the contrary. I am sure, that he who has all his Life long resisted the Calls of God, and slighted the Overtures of his Mercy, has little Reason to expect Prerogative Mercy at the last, i. e. when he deserves not the least Degree of Mercy, then to expect the greatest.

If any one object, in the next Place, May not God work a thorough Change in a Man at the last ? I answer, There is nothing impossible to God : He may do what he pleases ; and if any Man had never heard of the *Gospel* till his Life were burnt out almost to a Snuff, I could believe that God both could and would work such a Change in one who embraced the Truth as soon as he heard it, and gladly accepted Mercy as soon as he perceiv'd it tender'd to him. But is this the Case of most Sinners upon their

Vol. III. Death-beds? I grant that in the Days of the *Messias* a strange and thorough Change was often wrought in Publicans and Sinners; but it was in those who had never been called in the same manner before. There was a Confluence of very surprizing Things at that Day, which might extraordinarily affect the Minds of Men: The Spirit of God was pour'd forth in an extraordinary measure; and God made way for its Reception, by the many Signs and Wonders with which he bore Witness to the Truth of the Gospel-Revelation. But where are the Miracles now? Where is that extraordinary Power of the Spirit, which did then often accompany them? 'Tis true, the Arguments are the same, but not address'd in the same manner; and, which is worse, they have been often heard, and as often slighted and rejected by the habitual Sinner.

I'll sum up all: Sin in the Soul, is like a Blot upon fair Paper; the longer it continues, the more indelible it grows. The Man who by frequent Shifts and Artifices hath fool'd and baffled Conscience, and oppress'd it by frequent Violences, who is besotted by the Bewitcheries of Sin, and feels none of those Wounds and Stings it gives, is not easily

ly awaken'd into Compunction and Sor-
row : He is like that Drunkard of So-
lomon, who lov'd the Sin, because be-
come insensible of its Mischiefs; *They*
have stricken me, and I was not sick; they Prov. 23:
have beaten me, and I felt it not : When 31:
shall I awake ? I will seek it yet again.
And if he can be made sensible of his
State, yet, ah ! how feeble and impo-
tent is he, how unable to help himself !
He hath added the Debauchery of Cu-
stom to the Corruption of his Nature :
Fancy and Sensuality have added new
Charms to those the World naturally
hath : The Impulses and Influences of
the Divine Spirit are more faint and
more seldom, and the natural Strength
of the human Soul impair'd ; and the
Lusts of the Body pamper'd into Rage
and Wantonness : The Understanding is
dim and clouded in discovering the Beau-
ties of spiritual Things ; but the Imagi-
nation of the sensitive Fancy luxurious
and romantick in dressing up the Ob-
jects of Sense to the best Advantages :
The Memory infects the Mind, by re-
peating the Images of Delight : The
Blood and Spirits, in despite of faint
Checks, are all in a Flame and Mutiny
at the sight of a darling Temptation.
This is the Constitution of a ripe Sin-
ner,

Weakness? Behold his Strength, and this his
 State: Yet what a strange Task hath he
 to perform? There's the belov'd Com-
 pany, the dear Confederates in Sin: He
 must be deaf to all their Insinuations,
 and scorn all their Taunts and Buffoon-
 ry: There's the belov'd Pleasures, which
 he must not only abstain from, but scorn
 and hate; he must not only ne'er com-
 mit his lost Sins again, but he must be
 heartily sorry that e'er he did. In one
 word, he must, let him begin when he
 will, overcome the World and himself; he
 must delight in what was before a
 Toil and a Pain to him; and he must
 exchange the Life of Sense into one of
 Faith. When all these Difficulties are
 considered, it will be evident to you, that
 he who declines Repentance to Day, as
 a hard and troublesome Undertaking,
 will be very unlikely to be tempted to
 it by its Easiness and Softness many
 Years hence. But alas! suppose that
 Temptations did not, like Enemies, by
 frequent Victories grow more insolent
 and irresistible; or that we did not, like
 an oppressed enslav'd People, lose any
 thing of our Strength or Courage by
 the Length of our Servitude, and the
 frequent Repetition of tame and coward-
 ly Compliances; nay, by our doating at
 length

length upon our Tyrants and our Chains: Sermon
 Could all this, I say, be suppos'd, yet, **VIII.**
 there is one Argument behind dread-
 ful enough to confound our Impudence
 and Folly, and startle and scare our Va-
 nity and Presumption; which is,

2dly, The Uncertainty of God's Pro-
 cedure towards presumptuous Sinners.
 'Tis a very doubtful kind of Encourage-
 ment, I might almost have said, an inti-
 midating one; a sort of terrible Consola-
 tion, which St. Peter makes use of to
*Simon Magnus, Repent therefore of this thy Wickedness, and pray God, if per-
 haps the Thought of thine Heart may be
 forgiven thee. Perhaps!* Acts 9. 22.
 Is it but a Per-
 adventure? Is the Success of Repentance
 it self doubtful? Is Remission of Sin un-
 certain to presumptuous Sinners, even
 upon Supposition of Repentance? This
 has puzzled all *Interpreters* to this Day:
 I am sure it ought to puzzle and amaze
 a presumptuous Sinner. I confess, I am
 equally surpriz'd at the Dulness of *In-
 terpreters*, and the Impudence of Sin-
 ners; why one should, or the other
 should not stumble at this Text. The
 Truth is, the *Repentance* here spoken
 of, is a true and real one, or else St. Peter
 would never have exhorted to it; and
Perhaps,

Vol. III *Perhaps*, in despite of all the Efforts of Criticks, does imply Uncertainty here, as it does in all *Authors* that ever wrote Greek, and understood it: But the *Forgiveness* here spoken of does not relate to Eternal but Temporal Punishments, as is very obvious from the Context. But even thus interpreted, does not the *Text* suggest to a Presumptuous Sinner a very frightening Consideration, That if such a one does at length actually repent, 'tis odds but God will punish his Presumption by Judgments and Calamities in this Life; *Some Mens Sins are open before hand, going before to Judgment; and some Men they follow after.* The Truth is, this kind of Sinners are seldom rouz'd out of their Lethargy, or Apoplexy, I think I may call it, but by Causticks, Corrosives, Lancing, and Amputation; they are seldom recover'd to their Wits but by terrible and grievous Judgments; 'tis a Mercy if God lays them on; and no wonder, if to compleat their Cure, and to deter others, he do not soon take them off. Let the Sinner then know, that however it go with him in Eternity, he shall get little here by his Continuance in his Pleasures, since he must suffer so much for them.

But

1 Tim. 5.
24.

But alas! this is the least part of his Sermon
 Danger; tho' God sometimes suffers long, **VIII.**
 yet how often does he unexpectedly cut off
 the Sinner? *Boast not thy self of to-mor-* **Prov. 27.1.**
row; for thou knowest not what a Day
may bring forth. How often does he
 blast him in the full Career of his En-
 joyments, and never lets him live to
 those Days, which he, it may be, de-
 stin'd to Repentance? Ah, vain and
 impudent Projects! for us to dispose of
 the Mercies and Graces of God, as if
 we, not He, were the Dispensers of
 Life and Health, of Wisdom and Holi-
 ness. *Thou Fool, this Night shall thy* **Luk. 12.20.**
Soul be required of thee. Cut it down, **Ch. 13.**
why cumbresth it the Ground? **Ps. 7.**
 When God gives a confident Sinner Health and
 Plenty, Affluence and Pleasure, he ought
 to fear lest the same thing befall him
 which did the Israelites, when God
 gave them Meat for their Lusts. *And*
while the Flesh was yet between their **Numb. 11.**
Teeth, e're it was chewed, the Wrath of **32.**
the Lord was kindled against the People;
and the Lord smote the People with a very
great Plague. This is what God threat-
 ens, *He that being often reprov'd, hard-* **Prov. 29. 1.**
eneth his Neck, shall suddenly be destroy'd,
and that without Remedy. But alas!
 should


 Vol. III. should God only forsake him, should he withdraw his Providence, and leave the poor Creature to himself, forbearing to prevent or restrain, to divert or interrupt him in the prosecution of his Lust and Folly, there needs nothing farther to destroy him; he will fall suddenly a Sacrifice to his own Sin, and perish by the Looseness and Extravagance of his own Counsels and Doings; according to that of Solomon, *Therefore they shall eat of the Fruit of their own Way, and be filled with their own Devices.* For the turning away of the Simple shall slay them, and the Prosperity of Fools shall destroy them. And if the Man falls into the Pit which he has digg'd for his own Soul; if he be overwhelm'd by that Ruin which his own Sins have drawn down upon him, 'tis no wonder if God will not be prevail'd with even by Prayers or Tears to step in to his Rescue. *Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my Hand, and no Man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my Counsel, and would none of my Reproof: I also will laugh at your Calamity, I will mock when your Fear cometh; when your Fear cometh as Desolation, and your Destruction cometh as a Whirlwind,*
when

Prov. I. 31,
 32.

ver. 24,---
 29.

when Distress and Anguish cometh upon Sermon
you. Then shall they call upon me, but **VIII.**
I will not answer; they shall seek me ear-
ly, but they shall not find me. — For this Psal. 32. 6.
shall every one that is Godly, pray unto
thee in a Time when thou mayest be found;
surely in the Floods of great Waters they
shall not come nigh unto him.





SERMON IX.

The Death of a Sinner, not of
GOD, but himself.

EZEK. xxxiii. 11.

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, but that the Wicked turn from his way and live: Turn you, turn you from your Evil Ways; for why will you die, O House of Israel?



THESE Words being ap- Vol. III.
plied to Christians, will
contain a very pressing
and passionate Invitation
to Repentance; and the
Sense of them being a lit-
tle enlarged, or explain'd in a familiar
Comment, will amount to thus much:

Vol. III.

" O House of Israel! all you who are
 " enter'd into Covenant with me by Bap-
 " tism; you, for whom the Son of my Bo-
 " som has shed his Blood; you, to whom
 " the glad Tidings of Salvation have been
 " often preach'd; you, to whom the un-
 " questionable Authority of the Gospel
 " has been undeniably and evidently made
 " out, both from the Perfection and Pu-
 " rity of the Doctrine it self, and from
 " the Miracles (especially the Resur-
 " rection of Jesus from the Dead) by
 " which it was attested; Why will you
 " walk unworthy of the Vocation where-
 " with you are called? Why will you
 " defeat all the Methods of my Mercy?
 " Why will you destroy your selves?
 " Why will you die? Impute not your
 " Ruin, your Eternal Misery, to Surprise
 " or Ignorance; for I have set Life and
 " Death before you: Eternal Life as the
 " Reward of Holiness; Eternal Death
 " as the Punishment of Wickedness.
 " And this my Will hath been publish'd
 " and declar'd with that Clearness, with
 " that Fulness, with that Authority,
 " that you can neither be ignorant of
 " this Truth, nor have any Colour to
 " reject the Belief of it. What is it
 " then that tempts you to slight my
 " Mercy, or despise my Wrath? Whence
 " is

" is it that you live as if you were fond Ser. IX.
 " of Ruin? *Why will you die?* Ah, 
 " wretched Blindness! Ah, fatal Ob-
 " stinacy! For from this alone springs
 " all your Misery: For as for me, who
 " am the Author and Governor of the
 " World, think not that I have contriv'd
 " your Ruin; think not that ever I shall
 " force or necessitate you to be misera-
 " ble: It is a Design my Nature abhors.
 " *As I live, I have no Pleasure in the*
 " *Death of the Wicked; but that the*
 " *Wicked turn from his Way, and live.*
 " Your Holiness is acceptable to me, not
 " your Wickedness; your Salvation, not
 " your Ruin: It is your Salvation I ear-
 " nestly desire. This is that which I
 " have labour'd to procure by all the
 " astonishing Methods of Love and Mer-
 " cy: And when I behold your Insen-
 " sibility and Wilfulness, by which
 " you frustrate all my Attempts, and
 " draw upon your selves unspeakable
 " Misery, my Compassions are kindled
 " within me; I cannot forbear repeating
 " most passionate Expostulations and Ad-
 " dresses, *Why will ye die, O House of*
 " *Israel?* What is it that hurries you
 " on to those Paths that lead to Destru-
 " ction? What is it that carries you on
 " towards that Misery which is insuf-
 " ferable,

Vol. III. "ferable, and from which you should
 "fly with unspeakable Dread and Hor-
 "ror? I require no impossible Task of
 "you: I enjoin nothing as the Condition
 "of Life, but what is in it self most
 "equitable, most advantagious, most
 "delightful. What has Righteousness
 "in it, that gives you so much Distaste
 "and Discouragement? Or what has Sin
 "in it, that can tempt you to purchase
 "it, by undergoing Eternal Pain? Turn
 "you, turn you from your Evil Ways.

The Words thus paraphras'd, and ad-
 dress'd to Unregenerate Christians, con-
 tain Three Things:

I. That the End of Sin will be
 unspeakable Misery, signified here by
Death.

II. That the Death of a Sinner is not
 to be charg'd upon God: *As I live, saith
 the Lord, &c.*

III. That the Death of a Sinner is
 not to be charg'd upon the Unreasona-
 bleness or Impossibility of that Duty,
 which God proposes as the Condition of
 Life, but upon his own Folly and Wil-
 fulness.

I shall

I shall speak to each of these: And, Ser. IX.

I That the End of Sin will be unspeakable Misery. This is the plain Voice of Scripture in almost every Page of the New Testament: If ye live after the Flesh, ye shall die; but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the Deeds of the Body, ye shall live. The Wages of Sin is Death. And the Righteous Judgment of God, which is to be reveal'd at the Last Day, is said to be plainly this; To them, who by patient Continuance in well-doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, Eternal Life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness, Indignation and Wrath; Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil; of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile, and much more of the Christian. Accordingly, our Saviour describing the Last Great Judgment, represents the Issue and Conclusion of all Things, in these few, but full and clear Words: And these shall go away into Everlasting Punishment; but the Righteous into Life Eternal.

Looking now upon this as the Word of God, a Truth which the Son of God publish'd, and God himself has borne Witness

Vol. III. to by Miracles, let us make a Stand here, and consider what it is, thus to die, what it is the wilful, the impenitent Sinner is to suffer. To Die, in this Sense, is to bid an Eternal Adieu, once to all the good Things of this Life, and to the Hopes of another. Thus to Die, is to be deliver'd up to that Eternal Night, where not one Ray of this visible Sun, not one Ray from the Presence or Favour of God shall ever shine. The wretched Sinner once condemned to this forlorn State, must never behold *Jerusalem* in its Beauty, must never enter into the Rest or Glory of the City of God, nor ever taste of the Joys of the Blessed. Wretched Creature! when this Life is at an End, thy Joys, thy Pleasures, are at an End for ever. Thou hast had thy Portion. There will be Pleasures, unspeakable Pleasures there will be to all Eternity, but no Glean, no Sprinkling of *em* shall ever fall to thy Share. And this, though it will fill the Mind with unspeakable Torment and Despair, with unsufferable Rage and Anguish, yet it is the least Part of that which the Scripture denounces against the Sinner by *Eternal Death*. For this implies Eternal Agonies, Eternal Pains, such Pains as attend Death, when it makes

makes its last Assault upon us; such Ser. IX.
 Pains as the tender Body feels when it
 is scorched with Flames, such, and in-
 finitely more will be his Pains, as are
 those of a Distracted Mind, when the mi-
 serable Creature wishes for Death, and it
 flies from him; such, and infinitely more,
 will be his Pains, as are those of a sick
 Body, that is weary of the Night, counts
 the tedious Hours, and longs for the Morn-
 ing, the Morning which, after all, doth
 but prolong its Misery rather than Life.
 This must, to all Eternity, be the State
 of a Damned Sinner. Endless Torture,
 Endless Despair, Endless Grief, and End-
 less Horror; this must be its Portion
 for ever. Ah! what Temptation can
 you find in this State? What Pleasure,
 what Allurement can you discern in such
 a Death as this? 'Tis plain, there can be
 none. What then? Like the Leviathan
 in Job, who laughs at the Shaking of a
 Spear, do you despise all these Terrors
 of the Lord? What? Can you dwell
 with Everlasting Burnings? Are you able
 not only to bear, but even to conquer all
 the Punishments which Almighty Ven-
 geance can inflict upon you? If not,
 why do you rush on thus blindfold into
 a State of Misery? Why do you despise
 all the Threats, and all the Invitations

Job 41.29.

Vol. III. of God? *Why will you die?* Can you, who cannot endure the Melancholy (as you think it) of Religion and Devotion, endure the Melancholy of an Eternal Night? Can you, who cannot endure the Trouble (as you think it) of Temperance and Chastity, endure the Misery of Eternal Pain? Can you, who cannot think of Temporal Death and Dissolution, but it chills your Blood, and damps all the Briskness of your Mirth, can such as you think, without Horror, of Eternal Death? *Why then do you chuse this State? Why will you die?* Will you say, that the Punishments of Sin are expressed in *Scripture* by Metaphors, Allusions, and Allegories? What then? How great still must those Torments be, which the Spirit of God seems to labour in the expressing, and could describe by no other, but the sharpest of those Punishments which we are able to form to our selves any Notion or Imagination of? Will you go farther, and affirm whatever we are told of Future Punishment to be meer Fiction, devis'd on purpose to keep the Rude and Ignorant in Awe? Then is the Gospel but a cunningly-devis'd Fable, and *Christ is not risen*; but the *Apostles*, who seal'd their Testimony to his Resurrection with their Blood, were not

not only the *most miserable*, but the most **Ser. IX.**
stupid and wicked of all Men. Nay, if 
Christ be not risen, then have no Miracles
ever been wrought in his Name: But (which is the greatest Miracle of all)
the Pride and Obstinacy of the Jew, the
Superstition of the *Gentile*, the Vain-
glory and Self-conceit of the Philosopher,
the Craft of the Politician, the Power of
the whole *Roman Empire*, the Industry
and Malice of the Devil, have been all
baffled and over-power'd by the Preach-
ing of a few illiterate Fisher-Men, with-
out the Assistance of any supernatural
Means. But if all this be too absurd
and gross to be believed, then must there
remain for the Sinner such a future State
of Torment as I have been describing to
you.

Now who would not be apt, at first,
to conclude, it were impossible that any
Man should make this *Death* his Choice,
that nothing but an utter Impossibility
of ever attaining Life, could reduce Man
to this miserable State of *Death*? I will
therefore next endeavour to shew, That
no Man is miserable, merely because it
was impossible for him to be otherwise,
but because he would be so; and that
Men may escape *Death*, if they will en-
deavour it sincerely. For,

II. The

Vol. III.

II. The Death of a Sinner is not to be charged on God. To believe that God made Man on purpose to make him miserable, or that ever God did contrive an inevitable Necessity of his Ruin, is utterly repugnant to the Divine Nature, and to the manifest Declarations of his Will. If we regard the Divine Nature, *God is Love*, and nothing that is cruel can proceed from him. *Man* is his Creature, his Off-spring; and therefore we may rationally conclude, that the Goodness of God does as naturally incline him to desire and promote the Happiness of his Creatures, as natural Affection doth move the Parent to endeavour that of his Children. And in arguing thus, I argue no otherwise than the Light of Nature taught the Gentiles to do, than the Spirit taught the Prophets to do; no otherwise than Christ himself doth; *What Man is there among you, whom if his Son ask Bread, will he give him a Stone? Or if he ask a Fish, will he give him a Serpent? If ye then being evil, know how to give good Gifts unto your Children, how much more shall your Father which is Heaven give good Things unto them that ask him?*

Mat. 7. 9.
10, 11.

The Account which God gives us of Ser. IX
his own Nature, in my Text, is this, That
he has no Pleasure in the Death of the
Wicked: And in like manner he describes
himself, in the Prophet Jeromy, to be
the Lord which exercises Loving-kindness,
Judgment, and Righteousness in the
Earth; for in these Things I delight, saith
the Lord. And that Joy which the
Conversion of a Sinner creates in Hea-
ven, is an undeniable Testimony of God's
Love to Mankind.

Jer. 9. 24.

Luke 15.

But we need not establish this Propo-
sition upon Inferences deduced from the
Divine Nature; the Scriptures of God
sufficiently declare his Will to this Pur-
pose, That God heartily desires the Sal-
vation, but not the Death of Mankind.
God will have all Men to be saved, and
to come unto the Knowledge of the Truth.
What else signify all the Calls and Invi-
tations of the Gospel? Come unto me all
ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and
I will give you rest. What else speaks
the Blood of Jesus, shed for the Sins
of the World? God so lov'd the World,
that he gave his only-begotten Son, that
whosoever believeth in him should not pe-
rish, but have Everlasting Life. What
else doth the general Promise of God's
Spirit, made to all those that seek him,
signify?

1 Tim. 2. 4.

Mat. 11. 28.

Joh. 3. 16.

Vol. III signify? Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. What else doth the Commission given to the Apostles signify, That they should go and preach Repentance and Remission of Sins amongst all Nations, beginning at Jerusalem? Why else are we Ambassadors for Christ, beseeching you in Christ's Stead, be ye reconciled to God?

Finally, If God doth not most earnestly desire the Salvation of his poor Creatures, why does he exercise the Riches of his Goodness and Long-suffering, even towards those who often-times despise it? Why doth he give space to repent, even to those, very often, who repent not? And in a word, when he hath done all, when he hath done so much for his Vineyard, that he could do no more, why doth he bemoan the Obstinacy. and commiserate the Ruin of impenitent Sinners? of which there are various Instances in the Prophets of the Old Testament, and one famous one in the New, when our Saviour beheld Jerusalem, and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known even thou, at least in this thy Day, the Things which belong unto thy Peace! Which Way now could God give his Creatures clearer Assurance that he desires their Happiness? Tho' we should not

not be able to comprehend that Description of the Divine Nature. **Ser. IX.** *St. John* gives us, *God is Love*; yet methinks, when he woos and presses us to return and live; when he waits and pursues us with the Tenders of Mercy and Pardon; when he gives us his *Son* to die for us, and offers us his *Spirit* to assist us; when he invites us with a Heaven, and terrifies us with a Hell; this should at length convince us, That he *hath no Pleasure in the Death of the Wicked, but that the Wicked turn from his Way, and live.* It is evident therefore that the Sinner's Destruction is of himself; that God is not the Cause of any Man's Ruin. No; on the quite contrary, he doth most vehemently desire the Happiness of his Creatures, and has endeavour'd to secure it by the most amazing Methods of Love and Mercy. Why therefore do you disappoint his Goodness? Why do you neglect this great Salvation? Why will you die?

If there was now any thing that could be reasonably return'd as an Answer to this Question, it should be this: 'Tis true, no Man can be so destitute and forsaken of all Love of himself, or Sense of his Interest, as to prefer Death before Life: Nor can it be denied but that all the Characters of God, which can

Vol. III. can be deriv'd either from the Light of Nature, or the Gospel, represent him infinitely gracious and merciful: But yet such is the Difficulty we are to encounter in the Way to Heaven, so hard (if not impossible) is the Condition of Life, that our Death and Ruin is thereby made unavoidable. This was the Answer the wicked and slothful Servant, in the Gospel, made to his Lord; *I know thee, that thou art an hard Man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not sowed.* And this is that which I am now to speak to.

III. That the Death of a Sinner is not to be charg'd upon the Unreasonableness or Impossibility of that Duty which God proposes as the Condition of Life. If this were so, were our Duty so extremely difficult as some would represent it, all that could be reasonably infer'd from this, is, That we ought to be the more Watchful, and the more Industrious; That we ought to contend to enter into Life with the more Vigour and Resolution, *because strait is the Gate, and narrow is the Way.* For whatever the Troubles and Inconveniencies, whatever the Hardships and Difficulties of Christianity were, they would be infinitely more

more tolerable than Eternal Misery; **Set. IX.**
 and the Prospect of Life and Glory
 would in all reason take off from the
 Sharpness of our Sufferings, and the
 Burden of our Labours, and make us go
 thorow all cheerfully and perseveringly.
 And as there are no Difficulties in Ver-
 tue, so neither any Pleasures in Vice,
 which the firm Belief and due Confide-
 ration of a Heaven and a Hell would not
 enable us to conquer: *For what is a* **Mat. 16. 26.**
Man profited, if he shall gain the whole
World, and lose his own Soul? Or what
shall a Man give in Exchange for his Soul?
 It was this Faith which supported the
 Martyrs, when they resisted unto Blood.

But let us consider what God requires
 of us: Faith in Jesus? Why should it
 be difficult to us to believe on him,
 whom God has declar'd to be his Son, by **Rem. 1. 4.**
 the Effusion of his Spirit, by the Mi-
 racles of his Divine Power, and by the
 Resurrection from the Dead? What is it
 he requires of us? A Holy and a vir-
 tuous Life? Why should it seem hard
 to us to Love and Fear God, a Being so
 infinitely lovely and glorious in himself,
 and so infinitely gracious towards us?
 Why should it seem hard to us to love
 our Neighbour, who is Partaker of our
 own Nature, and by whom both our
 Necessities

Vol. III. *Necessities and our Pleasures are provided for? Why should it, lastly, seem hard to us to live within the Bounds of Sobriety and Chastity, since these are so absolutely necessary to the Health of our Bodies, and to the Honour and Prosperity of our Temporal Estates? In a word, Why should it seem hard to us to seek the Kingdom of Heaven, which is a Kingdom of so much Glory and Happiness? Or why should it seem hard to us to seek the Righteousness thereof, which is so extremely serviceable to the Peace and Tranquility of our Bosoms?*

To state this Matter right, it must be acknowledg'd, That to him whose Principles are corrupted, who is enslaved to Sin, who is grown wholly sensual, who can relish nothing but carnal Pleasures, and worldly Interest, it is a very hard Matter to subdue his Corruptions, to extirpate his evil Habits, and to break off a Course of Wickedness and Debauchery; which is the Sense of the Prophet, *Jer. 13. 23. Can the Ethiopian change his Skin, or the Leopard his Spots? Then may ye also do Good, that are accustom'd to do Evil.* But to him who has not been depraved by vicious Habits, but has been brought up under the Discipline of a Civil and Religious Education, it is not a Matter of

of that extreme Difficulty to embrace **Ser. IX.**
 Godliness in the Power of it, which is
 frequently asserted by Solomon in the *Old*,
 and was verified in most of the Prose-
 lytes of Christianity under the *New*
Testament, and to Those who have actu-
 ally renounced their Sins, and devoted
 themselves sincerely to God, Religion
 is so far from being burdensome and in-
 tolerable, that it is easy and delightful:

My Yoke is easy, and my Burden is light. Mat. 11. 30.

— His (God's) Commandments are not
 grievous. Nay farther, *Her Ways are* 1 Joh. 5. 3.

Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths
are Peace, saith Solomon of Wisdom. Prov. 3. 17.

The Fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace. Gal. 5. 22.

— Now the God of Hope fill you with
 all Joy and Peace in Believing. Rom. 15.
 13.

hence it is that the New Life is called a
 State of Light, of Life, of Liberty,
 of Rest, of Glory. If all this be put
 together, the Difficulty of Repentance is
 such as should not discourage a Sinner:
 For he has a Glorious Reward propos'd
 him, to awaken and support his Industry;
 the Spirit of God is ready to assist him;
 and if he do but once break the Yoke,
 and shake off the Dominion of his habi-
 tual and imperious Lusts, he shall after-
 wards find all the Ways of God full of
 Delight and Satisfaction. And let this,

Vol. III. *lastly*, quicken his Resolution; if he does not escape out of these Corruptions, he must be miserable; if he does not conquer his Sins, he must die.

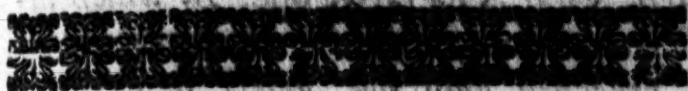
Lay this whole Discourse together, and it will easily appear what should be the Natural Influence of it. God has given a Life of a few Years, and on this Moment depends Eternity. *Life and Death is set before us*, and according to our Behaviour, we shall be eternally happy, or eternally miserable: For *Acts 17. 31. God has appointed a Day in the which he will judge the World*; and in this Day, *2 Cor. 5. 10. every one shall receive the Things done in his Body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.* Why then should we die? Why should we be miserable to all Eternity? We have to do with a good God, who most sincerely and passionately desires that we may turn and live. How great soever our Sins are, his Mercy is greater, *Eccles. 2. 18. for as is his Majesty, so is his Mercy.* What Sins can then be too great to obtain Pardon, when the Eternal Son of God intercedes for it with our most merciful Father, in the Virtue of his Death and Merits? Nor let us be discouraged by the Difficulty of our Work: There is nothing so difficult, which a true

true Faith cannot vanquish. That Ge-Ser. IX.
spel which is the Power of God unto Sal- Rom. 1.16
vation, whose Truths deliver'd the loosest
and wickedest both of Jew and Gentile
from the *Bondage of their Corruption,*
will translate us *into the glorious Liberty* — Ch. 2.
of the Children of God. v. 21. That holy
Faith and Blessed Spirit, which enabled
the Followers of our Lord and Master to
endure all manner of fiery Trials, to
suffer the pulling out of the Right Eyes, Mar. 9.
and the cutting off the Right Hands,
will enable us to overcome our Darling
Lusts. But remember, whatever Diffi-
culty you are to encounter, 'tis extreme-
ly little, if compar'd with that Crown
of Glory which will reward your Con-
quest; and whatever Ease or Pleasure
you can flatter your selves with in Sin,
'tis so little, it can never quit Cost to be
Damn'd for it.

The End of the Ninth Sermon.

One Lord cannot send forth
two messengers of God into the world
and wished that of Jew and Gentile
from the bondage of their corruption,
will manifest us into the glorious liberty
of the children of God. Their body
shall and blessed spirit, which enabled
the followers of our Lord and Master to
ordain all manner of holy living to
follow the pattern set of the Virgin Mary,
and the company of the Righteous,
will enable us to overcome our earthly
enemies. This we must remember, whatever our
condition, we are to encounter temptation
to sin. If we are with the Church
of Christ, which will reward our good
deeds, and punish our evil, we must
remember that our hearts are in God,
and we must not let our feet be
loose from the ground.

The End of the World



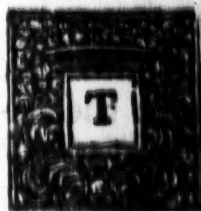
SERMON X.

The Goodness of GOD towards Sinners, set forth in the State of *St. Paul* before his Conversion.

[The First Sermon on this Text.]

1 COR. xv. 9, 10.

For I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the Grace of God I am what I am: And his Grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain; but I labour'd more abundantly than they all: Yet not I, but the Grace of God which was with me.



T HIS Chapter consists of Vol. III. of Three Parts. 1. A short Summary of the Gospel preach'd by *St. Paul*, the Belief of which, saves or justifies us: But this must not be a mere speculative or sluggish Belief, but a Cordial,

Vol. III. dial, Vital, Operative one, By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in Memory what

--- Ver. 2. I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. Where, to keep in Memory, is so to meditate on, as to be mov'd and affected by it; and to believe in vain, is when Faith is accompany'd with no Fruit, to which we have oppos'd in my Text, And his Grace which was bestow'd upon me was not in vain, but I labour'd more abundantly, &c. This appears likewise from the Inference with which St. Paul concludes the whole Chapter, Therefore my beloved Brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the Work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your Labour is not in vain in the Lord.

2. In the second Place, we have the Resurrection of Christ prov'd, partly by Testimonies, as a Matter of Fact, partly by Arguments drawn from the Absurdities which would unavoidably clog the Denial of it. Nor is this all, the Connexion of our Resurrection with that of Christ is at large demonstrated, and the main Difficulty about the Resurrection, How are the Dead raised up? answer'd and remov'd.

Lastly, We have here a Digression relating to St. Paul himself, proceeding not

not from Vanity, but Humility; and tend- Ser. X.
ing not to magnify himself, but the
Grade of God. A Digression which he
was very naturally led into; for when
he had urg'd *Christ's* Appearance to him
as a Proof of his Resurrection, he might
very well add, in order to give Weight
to this Testimony, this short Account of
himself, which we have in the Words
of my Text, *For I am the least of all
the Apostles, that am not meet, &c.*

If we behold this Text with a general
kind of View, we see in it a great Sinner
become a great Saint, a Blaphemer be-
come an Apostle, and a Persecutor be-
come a Confessor; and we may learn
what a vast Difference there is between
a good Conscience, and a right or well-
inform'd one; between the Heat and
Fury of a *Pharisee*, and the enlighten'd,
charitable, and humble Zeal of a true
Christian. But if we consider the Words
more closely and distinctly, we shall
find in them a short History of Saint
Paul's Life, containing these Three
Things.

I. What he was before his Conver-
sion, a Persecutor; *That am not
meet to be called an Apostle, because
I persecuted the Church of God.*

O 4

II. His

Vol. III.

II. His Conversion it self, owing to the wonderful Grace and Goodness of God; *But by the Grace of God I am what I am.*

III. The Deportment of St. Paul after his Conversion; *And his Grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain, &c.*

Each of which are capable of some Application.

I. To begin with the *first* Thing, The Moral State of St. Paul before his Conversion. This part of his Life makes a very different Appearance, according to the different Light we view it in. If we look upon him as a *Pharisee*, and examine his Life by the Notion that Sect had of Righteousness, he was an extraordinary Person, one of an excellent Character and great Reputation. This we may plainly gather from

Acts 23. 1. what he says of himself, *Men and Brethren, I have liv'd in all good Conscience before God until this Day.* And again,

Phil. 3. 6. *Touching the Righteousness which is in the Law, blameless.* But all that we can infer from hence, is only this, that he acted
consonant

confonant to the Principles of that Sect he *Ser. X.*
 was of; that he might have address'd him-
 self to God as the *Pharisee* did, who trusted *Luke 18. 9.*
 in himself that he was Righteous, and despi-
 sed others. *God, I thank thee, that I am* — *Ver. 11.*
not as other Men are, Extortioners, Un-
just, Adulterers, or even as this Publican.

But if we call his Life and Actions
 to the Test of the Gospel, if we behold
 him in the same Light he did himself
 when he became a Christian, we shall
 pass a very different Judgment upon him,
 we shall soon discern, that his Righte-
 ousness was that of which our Lord pro-
 nounces, *Except your Righteousness shall* *Mat. 5. 20.*
exceed the Righteousness of the Scribes
and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter
into the Kingdom of Heaven. Nay, I'm
 afraid it happen'd here, as our Saviour
 observ'd it did to others, concerning
 whom he speaks thus; *Ye are they* *Luk. 16. 15.*
which justify yourselves before Men; but
God knoweth your Hearts: for that
which is highly esteem'd amongst Men, is
Abomination in the sight of the God.
 For I can never think that Knowledge,
 destitute of Charity and Humility, can
 recommend a Man to God: I can never
 think, that Zeal, which discharges its
 self in Fury and Cruelty upon its Ad-
 versaries, or else exerts its self not in
 Solid

Vol. III. solid Virtues, but in Will-worship. Outward Rites and Observances, could be pleasing to God. And that this was the Case of Saul the Pharisee. I appeal to his own Words. For ye have heard of my Conversation in time past, in the Jews Religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the Church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews Religion, above many my Equals in mine own Nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the Traditions of my Fathers. But to go farther; I can never believe that mere negative Righteousness, consisting in being free from open and scandalous Immoralities, tho' this should proceed too from Principles, and a sense of Duty towards God, can ever atone for Pride, Passion, Wilfulness and Obstinacy in the Soul; or, that any Principles, any Pretences whatever, can hallow and consecrate Arrogance and Bitterness, Blasphemy and Murther. Let no Man think I charge the Pharisee with too much Severity. What Opinion had he himself when an Apostle, of that Knowledge, that Zeal, that Righteousness which he glory'd in when a Pharisee? It is of these he speaks in those Words, But what things were Gain to me, those I counted Loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things

Gal. I. 13,

14.

Phil. 3. 7,
8, 9.

things but Loss, for the Excellency of the Ser. X.
 Knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For
 whom I have suffer'd the Loss of all
 things, and do count them but Dung, that
 I may win Christ, and be found in him;
 not having mine own Righteousness, which
 is of the Law, but that which is through
 the Faith of Christ, the Righteousness
 which is of God by Faith.

Thus I have given a summary and
 general Account of the Morals of Saint
 Paul before his Conversion; and I should
 not add one Word farther, but that se-
 veral and great Truths may be built
 upon it, and we can never be too sure
 of the Grounds from whence we de-
 duce important Conclusions. I will
 therefore, for the fuller clearing of this
 Matter, consider these Two Things.

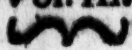
First, What Sentence St. Paul passes
 upon himself.

Secondly, What Reason he had so to
 do.

If, in the first place, we inquire what
 he thought of himself, it is evident,
 that he confesses himself not only a Sin-
 ner, but even the greatest of Sinners:
 This is a faithful Saying, and worthy of
 all Acceptation, that Christ Jesus came
 into the World to save Sinners, of whom

1 Tim. 1.
 15.

I am

Vol. III. *I am chief.* But if it be here objected,  That no One is so severe a Judge of a Penitent as he is of himself; that he is wont to aggravate and amplify his Sins beyond the due measure; and he who exercises not only Equity but Charity towards all others, is strict and rigorous towards himself; that he is as much a Stranger to Pride and Ambition, as the Sinner is to Humility, and therefore, if he enters upon Comparison of himself with others, he is apt to debase himself below 'em, as the Sinner is to prefer himself above 'em; and consequently that the Words of St. Paul are not too strictly to be urg'd to his Disadvantage. To this, I answer, It is true, an enlighten'd Soul thinks otherwise of Sin than an habitual Sinner does; and he always thinks worst of his own, because he knows himself best. In the Case of Others, there is room for Charity, but not in his own; for where we are ignorant, we may be willing, and ought to hope the best we can; but in our own Case, where we are conscious of every Aggravation of Sin, 'tis Partiality, 'tis Iniquity, to extenuate the Guilt of it. This is true, but it will do the Cause of our *Apostle* no Service; for tho' a Penitent may be very severe to his

his own Sin, yet he must not pronounce Ser. X. that Sin, that is none. *Blasphemy* then, and *Persecution*, and the like, being the Sins which the Apostle charges himself with; if these, thro' invincible Ignorance, had been no Sin at all, he could not upon this Account have pronounced himself the Greatest of Sinners; but if these were really Sins, I am sure they were Sins of a very Crimson Dye, and most provoking Malignity. So again, if a Penitent compare himself with others, he may very well, for the Reason I before gave, judge himself worse than others, though he should be really better; yet when he comes to compare Sin with Sin, he must not judge the one greater, and the other less, because the one is his, and the other his Neighbour's, but must examine the Causes, the Nature, and the Consequences of each Sin. Thus, no Man must pronounce Equivocation worse than Perjury, and an Affront to Man worse than Blasphemy against God; because Equivocation and an Affront to Man, is what he himself, Perjury and Blasphemy against God, what his Neighbour has been guilty of. Upon the whole then, we are not to press the Confession of the *Apostle*, Of whom I am chief, so strictly, as if he had exceeded all

Vol. III. all the Souls of Men in Crimes and Villanies; nor must we so far mollify and mitigate the Sense of it, as not to acknowledge him to be a very great Sinner. This will be more evident from our examining,

Secondly, The Reason of this Sentence he passed upon himself. In my Text he tells us, that he was unworthy to be called an Apostle, because he persecuted the Church of God. But there where he gives us the Reason why he look'd upon himself as the chiefest of Sinners, he draws up his Indictment more fully, *Who was before a Blasphemer, and a Persecutor, and Injurious.*

1 Tim. 1.
13.

1. He was a Blasphemer. I do not think that we are here to study for a different Notion of Blasphemy, from what we meet with amongst the Jews, in reference to our Lord: It is not easy to imagine but that St. Paul ran along with his Sect, and was as far transported with a blind Zeal, as any of the Pharisees were: Therefore I think he can mean nothing less here, by his being a Blasphemer, than that he look'd upon Christ as an Impostor, his Gospel as a Fable, and his Miracles as the Effects of the Power or Artifice of the Spirits of Darkness. I confess my self struck with
force

some degree of Fear, when I made this first Reflexion: "I was unwilling to suspect this *chosen Vessel* guilty of Sins of this height; Sins which commonly Divines judge incapable of Repentance and Pardon. But I can't tell how to help it; there is such a necessary Connexion between these Sins, that whoever was guilty of one, must have been guilty of all. Whoever believ'd Christ to be a Malefactor, could not consequently but believe his Gospel a Fable, and attribute his mighty Works to the Devil: Ay, on the other hand, no one could believe his mighty Works wrought by the Finger of God, but he must, as our Saviour argues, confess that the Kingdom of God was come upon 'em; that the Gospel our Saviour preached was the Word of God; and that he was the *Messias*. And one of these two the *Apostle* must have done; for there is not the least colour to imagine that St. Paul should not know that our Lord and his Followers wrought Miracles: They were too many, too publick, and notorious to escape the Knowledge of so considerable a Man as St. Paul; nor was there any way to elude the Force of this Argument, but that blasphemous one which the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* took up.

Ser. X.
~

Luk. ix. 40

Vol. III. 2. He was a *Persecutor*. He was resolv'd to destroy those whom he could not convince, and oppress that Truth by Force, which he was not able to resist by all his Wisdom and Learning: And so his Rage and Zeal stifling in him all the Sparks, I will not say of Charity, but even of Justice and Humanity, he resolv'd to lay waste the Church of Christ, and force the Followers of our Lord either to blaspheme, or die. I do not think that he was the first that rais'd Persecution against *Christians*; but 'tis plain, that he was engag'd very betimes in this Method, and join'd even with the first; for when the Blood of the first Martyr, *St. Stephen*, was shed, he was not only consenting to, but active in the Murther. Nor did this Spirit of Persecution in *Saul* confine it self within any Bounds; his Cruelty stopp'd not short of Death; and what Executions he began at *Jerusalem*, he resolv'd to carry on in other Cities, and pursue Christianity, if he could, where-ever it was planted. We have an Account of this in several Places of Scripture; but in none more fully than in *Acts* 26. *I verily thought with my self, that I ought to do many Things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth: Which Thing I also did in Jerusalem;*

— Ver. 9,
10, 11.

Salem; and many of the Saints did I shut Ser. X.
up in Prison, having receiv'd Authority
from the Chief Priests: And when they
were put to Death, I gave my Voice against
them. And I punish'd them oft in every
Synagogue, and compelled them to blas-
pheme. And being exceedingly mad against
them, I persecuted 'em even unto strange
Cities. Ah! By what Spirit was Saul
acted, when he breathed out nothing but
Blood and Slaughter? What Injustice,
what Wickedness was it, to treat the
most charitable and most peaceful amongst
Men as the worst of Malefactors? To
traduce and blast Men eminent for Wis-
dom, Holiness, and Miracles? To im-
prison, plunder, and butcher those against
whom there was in reality no Crime to
be laid; unless this were one, That
they were burning and shining Lights in a
wicked and adulterous Generation; that
they preferr'd the Truth of God before
the Traditions of Men, and Faith and
Charity before Superstitious Fancies;
and, in one Word, that they embrac'd the
Messias foretold by the Prophets, and
abundantly attested to by the Brightness
of his Wisdom, by the unspotted Holi-
ness of his Life, and by his Divine
Works? And what was an Aggravation
to all this, those whom Saul thus perfe-

Pcuted

Vol. III.  cuted were nearly related to him, by such Ties are wont very much to endear and unite Men.

3. The *third* and last Accusation, which St. Paul brings against himself, is, That he was *Injurious*, *ὕβρισ*. I cannot but think that this Word implies a distinct Head or Species of Sins from the other two; for that Conciseness which the *Apostle* here uses, does not seem to admit of any thing like Explication or Repetition. I may then very well guess that the *Apostle* hereby intimates, That he mingled his own Passion with his Zeal; that he often followed the *Impetus* of his own Heat and Choler; and that he went further in persecuting *Christians*, than what the Authority or Law by which he acted could countenance or justify: For *ὕβρις* may signify either direct Wrong, as to the Matter of an Action, or Contumely, Despite and, Insolence in the Manner of it. He loaded them with several Wrongs and Injuries which he had no Warrant for, and executed the Sentence of the *High Priest* and *Sanhedrim* in such a barbarous Manner, as no Man ought to treat the Unfortunate, even though the worst of Criminals. In this short Paraphrase of the Word *ὕβρις*, I am confident I do the *Apostle* no Wrong, because

because it is no more than what St. Luke, Ser. V. say, than what he charges himself with. What less can those Expressions import, *Being exceedingly mad against 'em.* And Acts 26. 11. *Saul yet breathing out Threatnings and — Ch. 9. 1. Slaughter against the Disciples of the Lord.* How that beyond Measure I persecuted the Church of God? Behold, to what a Degree of Wickedness a Man may be hurried by a mistaken Conscience! Behold what Crimes Men may be betray'd into by a blind Zeal!

I have consider'd the State of St. Paul before his miraculous Conversion, and shewn that it was not without Reason that he called himself the Chief of Sinners. But before I can proceed farther, I must first remove an Objection which lies in my Way.

'Tis this, That the Guilt of St. Paul is wonderfully extenuated, by his acting in all this as an honest Man, and following the Dictates of his Conscience. This I readily grant; for he tells us himself, That he *did it ignorantly, in Unbelief.* Tim. 1. 13. *I verily thought with my self, that I ought to do many things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth: And was zealous — ch. 22. 3. towards God, as ye all are this Day.* These Texts do, I confess, imply as much as the Objection contends for:

Vol. III. Nor do I in the least deny, but that  his Ignorance did extenuate his Sin; and recommend him to the Mercy of God; for he himself tells us, in that above-cited

1 Tim. 1. Place, *I obtain'd Mercy, because I did it*
 13. *ignorantly, in Unbelief.* However, we must not stretch this Excuse farther than he has done himself: This hinders not but that he was a great Sinner; which you will readily grant, if you consider these two or three Things.

1st, Tho' Unbelief may afford some kind of Plea for Blasphemy and Persecution, what can it afford for his being *Injurious*? Ignorance may yield some Defence to his Zeal; but what shall be an Apology for his Rage and Passion? Unbelief may in some sort justify legal Executions, (for those he thought so;) but what shall justify illegal Oppressions? What shall excuse his Rage and Fury, his Inhumanity and Barbarity? There is a Compassion due to the Miserable, whatever their Offences be; and in the Execution of severe Laws, a good Man ought rather to mitigate, than extend the Rigour of 'em, be they never so just. 'Tis Barbarous to insult those we punish; and to exasperate and encrease their Sufferings, when we should rather pity and alleviate 'em. This therefore

fore is the *first* Thing that deserves to be Ser. X. reflected on in the Behaviour of *Saul*: Though some Things seem to be the Faults of Ignorance and Unbelief, others are properly the Faults of the Man, as proceeding from Choler and Wilfulness, from the Warmth and Severity of his Temper, and from the want of that Tenderness and Charity which Christianity does, and Judaism, nay, Natural Religion, ought to have possess'd the Minds of all Men with.

2dly, We are to consider next, That the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* did what they did through Ignorance and Unbelief, as well as *Saul*: They who covenanted with *Judas* to betray our Lord; they who suborned false Witnesses against him; and they, finally, who nail'd him to the Cross, did it all through Ignorance and Unbelief. And it is evident that other Persecutors, as well as *Saul*, were mov'd and influenced by a Zeal of God: Thus our Saviour prays for those who with wicked Hands crucified him; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.* Thus *St. Peter* extenuates the Guilt both of the People and Elders in killing our Lord, *And now Brethren,* Acts 3. 17. *I wot, that through Ignorance ye did it, as did also your Rulers.* With whom

Vol. III. St. Paul exactly agrees, for speaking of the Wisdom of God in a Mystery, i. e. the Manifestation of the Divine Will for saving of the World by Christ, he has these Words, *Which none of the Princes of this World knew, for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.* And as to the Fury and Rage of the Jews against his Followers, our Saviour himself tells us, *They shall put you out of the Synagogues, yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God Service.* And to this St. Paul seems to me to have regard, Rom. 10. *For I bear 'em record, that they have a Zeal of God, but not according to Knowledge.*

But did this Ignorance and Unbelief so extenuate their Guilt, as that the Crucifixion of our Lord, and the killing of his Disciples, should not be Murther, or their rejecting the Evidence of Miracles should not be Blasphemy? Did this Ignorance and Unbelief stamp Innocence upon their Actions, or procure Impunity to their Persons? The Scriptures are too plain for any Man who reads them to make this Doubt. But you will say, Does not St. Paul tell us, that he obtained Mercy, because he did what he did ignorantly, in Unbelief. He does say so; and if I should say

say that the Elders and People of the Ser. X. Jews were on the same Account capable of Mercy, I think I should not err from the Mind of S. Paul: Witness his own Words, *Howbeit, for this Cause I obtain'd Mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all Long-suffering, for a Pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to Life everlasting.* But you will here demand, Do I intend to bring down Saint Paul to a Level with other Scribes and Pharisees, and to involve him in the same Guilt with those who crucified our Lord, and kill'd his Disciples? I answer, they were Murtherers, Persecutors, and Injurious; and so was once St. Paul: They were acted by a Zeal of God; and so was St. Paul: They did what they did through Ignorance, in Unbelief; and so did St. Paul. Thus far they are so very like, I know not how to distinguish 'em, if I would; and I know not why I should be desirous to do it; for the greater the Sinner, the more wonderful his Conversion; the more provoking his Guilt, the more illustrious God's Mercy: And for the magnifying this, as well as through his own Humility, the Apostle is so far from lessening his Sin, that he seems willing rather to exaggerate it, if it were capable of it. I will

Vol. III, therefore go farther yet: They went about to set up their own Righteousness; so did St. Paul: They were zealous for the Traditions of their Fathers; so was St. Paul: Finally, they were hot and furious, wilful and obstinate; and so was St. Paul. Thus far they were a like; but in other Things they were as unlike. The Scribes and Pharisees were too generally Hypocrites: This St. Paul was not: He was not a Saint in publick, and lewd in private; a *Sepulchre* painted without, and full of Rottenness within; he did not prostitute Religion to his Designs; he did not fast for popular Shew; nor make long Prayers, to devour Widows Houses. He was an honest Man; his Life was of a piece; he was the same in Publick and Retirement, touching the Righteousness which is in the Law, blameless; and what he did, he did with a good Conscience, though not an enlighten'd one. The Sum of this Remark amounts to thus much: Ignorance and Unbelief did indeed extenuate his Guilt; but did not so far excuse it, as that he might not justly be look'd upon as a great Sinner.

Mat. 23. 27.

— Jer. 14.

Phil. 3. 6.

3. Let us consider whence this Ignorance and Unbelief proceeded: No doubt, that of Saul flow'd from the same

same Source with that of other Scribes Ser. X. and Pharisees, there wanted no Evidence, no Light to convince 'em; but they clos'd their Eyes against it; their Minds were fortify'd against the Truth, by unreasonable Prejudices and Prepossessions; their Zeal for the Traditions of their Fathers, their Pretensions to a Legal Righteousness, their corrupt Glosses upon the Law and the Prophets, their groundless Expectations of a Temporal Kingdom, and a Secular Greatness: These were the Things that render'd them incapable of the Belief of Christ and his Gospel. And I will not doubt to say, with respect to those who persisted in their Infidelity, and were warm and active in their Opposition to Christianity, that in some direct Wickedness and Hypocrisy, and in the best, Self-conceit, Pride, Willfulness, Passion, and Earthiness, or Worldliness, were too too predominant, and contributed extreamly to confirm and harden them in their Infidelity: And if our Lord and Master could truly say of St. Peter, *Thou favour'st not the Things that be of God, but those that be of Men*, this undoubtedly may in a higher Degree be applied to St. Paul in his State of Ignorance and Infidelity. This may be easily inferr'd, not only from the

Mat. 16. 23.

Vol. III. the Deportment of *Saul*, and the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, but also from the Means offer'd for their Conviction and Illumination. Our Lord and Master did not abrogate, but fulfil the Law; he advanced the Knowledge and Worship of the True God; here form'd their corrupt Comments on the Law, confuted their vain Traditions, and propagated true Holiness in the World. He wrought numerous and amazing Miracles, and accomplish'd all the Predictions of the *Prophets* relating to the *Messias*: And had not their Judgments been strangely perverted, the Meanness of his Appearance would have been no Obstacle to their Reception of him, since the Law and the *Prophets* had plainly and frequently foretold that a State of Humiliation andufferings was to precede that of the Glory of the *Messias*. And this I think is abundantly enough to prove that the Ignorance of *Saul* was not an invincible one, but a sinful and criminal one.

The Sum of all that I have said is this: St. Paul, reflecting upon his Deportment while he was yet an Unbeliever, might very well, in several respects, account himself the *Chief* of Sinners; for if he compar'd himself with the Sinners of the *Gentiles*, he had clos'd his

Eyes

Eyes against that Light, and had harden- Ser. X.
 ed his Heart against those Means, that
 they had not yet been vouchsafed. And
 in this Case we cannot be ignorant of
 the Woe our Lord pronounced against
Bethsaida, Corazin, and Capernaum; nor
 be ignorant how nearly St. Paul was MAT. 11. 21.
 concern'd in it. If, in the next place,
 he compar'd himself with Sinners of the
Jews, he might very well look upon
 himself as worse than the Generality
 of Unbelievers, because he had added
 to his Infidelity and Blasphemy, Cruelty
 and Persecution.

If, in the *third* place, he compar'd
 himself with the Generality of Persecu-
 tors and Blasphemers, he might very
 well think himself, in some respects, as
 much worse than these; partly, because
 he added Injuriousness to Blasphemy and
 Persecution; partly, because being a
 Man made to be great and eminent in
 what he undertook, his Zeal was as
 much more prejudicial to the Cause of
 Christ than that of other Scribes and
Pharisees, as his Parts and Learning, his
 Industry, Eloquence, Courage, Constan-
 cy, and the just Reputation of his Le-
 gal Uprightness and Integrity did tran-
 scend theirs.

I have

Vol. III. I have done with the first Thing contained in my Text, and shewn what *St. Paul* was in his Unconverted State.

I hope no one will impute to me an Error, that I have insisted so long upon the Sins of *St. Paul*; because, as far as I am able to judge, there was a Necessity for it: For, *first*, in this Matter was very obscure and difficult. And in the next place, we could neither have taken a right View of his Conversion and Virtues, without a full and clear Understanding of his Sins and Guilt; nor could we with any Certainty and Clearness have establish'd upon all, those great and important Inferences which were the main Things I design'd when I pitch'd upon this Subject.

Before therefore I proceed to the Second thing, the Conversion of *St. Paul*, I will observe to you, from what has been said, the infinite Mercy, the boundless Goodness of God towards Sinners. For, *for this Cause St. Paul obtain'd Mercy, that in him first Jesus Christ might shew forth all Long-suffering, for a Pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to Life everlasting.* And indeed, what Sins are too big for the Goodness of God to pardon; since he has

1 Tim. i.
16.

has actually pardon'd Blasphemy and Per- **Set. X**
secution, Rapine and Murther, aggravated 
by Arrogance and Contumely, and
various kinds of Injuries and Cruelties?
Nor let any one tell me, that the resist-
ing the Light, the opposing the Fulness
of Evidence, may render a Sinner unca-
pable of Pardon, when God has forgiv-
en Idolatry under the *Old Testament*,
and Blasphemy under the *New*, in the
Rejecting Himself, the Crucifying his Son,
and the Resisting his Spirit.

However, one Thing I must here
warn you, That it is not always safe to
argue from Instances and Examples; or to
infer from what God has done, that he
will always do the same. And that for
these two Reasons:

1. Because 'tis very hard to find two
Cases directly alike. There may be ma-
ny Things in another's Case, which we
may be ignorant of, and consequently,
we may be much deceived, if we apply
it to our own. Thus, for Instance,
should a Man argue, that because *Christ*
forgave the Penitent *Thief* upon the
Crois, therefore he will forgive every one
that repents, though upon a Death-bed;
this way of Reasoning may prove very
wrong. For, who can be assur'd what
Calls, what Means the *Thief* was vouch-
safed;

Völ. III. *Isafed*, or what Light and Grace he had resisted? Who can resolve that this was the first Act of his Repentance, upon the Cross, or that this was not his first Call? Who can tell what did extenuate his Offence, or what there was in his Case peculiar that mov'd God to shew him Mercy? And without a clear Knowledge of these and the like Circumstances, how can we conclude that his Case, and that of a Death-bed Penitent is the same? And if we are not sure that the Case is the same, how can we be sure that God will proceed in the same Manner towards them?

2. It is not safe arguing from Instances or Examples; because, though God does generally act by fix'd and settled Rules; yet he may sometimes make use of his Prerogative, and act in an extraordinary Manner. Thus, we cannot from God's pardoning *St. Paul*, infer that he will pardon all Blasphemers and Persecutors, unless we have some other Ground to go on; because this might be a particular Instance of extraordinary Mercy. 'Tis true, where there are many Instances of the same Kind, and no extraordinary or miraculous Circumstances, we may then judge that God acts according to the Law he has set himself, and not according

ing to any particular Grace or Dispensation. Ser. X.

But as to *St. Paul*, he does himself inform us, in the Place above cited, that *God* design'd it as a Precedent, and that 'twas not for his own sake only, that *God* dealt thus graciously with him, but for the sake of others, who were Persecutors and Blasphemers, that they, by his Example, might be encouraged to hope for Mercy, and repent. When we reflect on this, how ought we to stand astonish'd at the Infiniteness of Divine Mercy! We may cry out as justly, *Ω βδδδ, O the Depth!* when we contemplate the Goodness, as the *Wisdom of* Rom. 11: 33.
God. Was it not enough, that *God* should pardon the Frailty, and pity the Weakness of Man; but will he forgive his Wilfulness and Presumption too? Was it not enough, that *God* should pardon Man for his Mistakes or Negligences, in reference to the Light of Nature; but will he pardon him too, when he obstinately closes his Eyes against the Light of Revelation? Was it not enough, that *God* should pardon such Sins as Men were naturally led to, such Sins as were repugnant to the Purity of the Gospel; but must he pardon those too which are repugnant even to Humanity,
such

Vol. III. such into which nothing could betray
 ~~~~~ Men but extravagant Principles, I mean  
 Violence, Cruelty, and Murther? In a  
 word; Was it not enough, that God  
 should pardon the rejecting his Grace,  
 or the receiving it in vain; but will he  
 also pardon the blaspheming, opposing,  
 and fighting against it? Ah! How un-  
 willing must God be, *that any should*  
*perish*; and how desirous that every one  
 should be sav'd! Who can be so wicked  
 as to be incapable of Mercy, when God  
 is ready to extend it to such whose  
 Hearts were wilfully and presumptuously  
 bent against him; whose Tongues were  
 envenom'd with Blasphemy against his  
 Son, and Calumny against his Servants,  
 and their Hands stain'd in the Blood of  
 his Saints? Ah! let us ever bless him,  
 let us ever love him, and let us ever ac-  
 knowledge that as he is Great, and there  
 is no End of his Greatness, so is he  
 Good, and there is no End of his Good-  
 ness. Let us therefore never despond,  
 let us never despair: If we are but  
 willing to return, he will ever be wil-  
 ling to receive us: If we be but willing  
 to repent, he will ever be willing to  
 shew Mercy: And if our Shame and  
 Sorrow cast us to the Ground before  
 him, his Mercy and Compassion will  
 soon

soon lift us up, and place us in his Bosom, Ser. X. in his Heaven. And why do'st thou any longer doubt or stop? Why do'st thou not immediately humble thy self, and cry out for Mercy, as the *Ninevites* did? Why do'st thou not immediately cry out as the *Blind* and the *Leprous* did, *Jesus*, Luk. 17. 13. *thou Son of David, have Mercy on us?* Or, as *St. Paul* did, when struck down to the Ground, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Acts 9. 6. Why do'st thou linger? Why do'st thou draw back? Why does thy Heart misgive thee? Hast thou out-done *Manasses* in the *Old Testament*, or *St. Paul* in the *New*? Hast thou committed any thing worse than *Idolatry*, *Murther*, and *Blasphemy*?

*The End of the Tenth Sermon.*



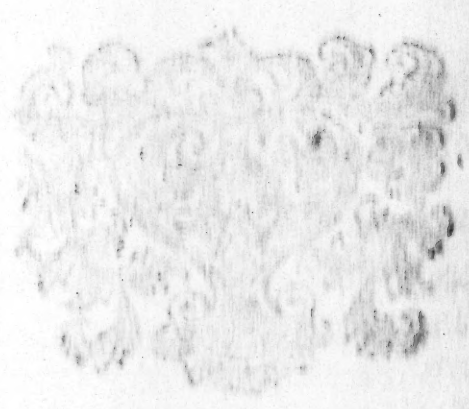
Q

S E R.



lean lift up, and place on his holm, see  
in his heaven. And why dost thou  
forget words of God? Why dost thou  
not immediately humble thy self, and  
cry out for mercy, as the heathen did?  
Why dost thou not immediately cry out  
as the blind and the lame did? Why  
dost thou of David? Why dost thou  
Of us? David and we are flesh and bone  
the ground. And thou wilt not have  
us to love? Why dost thou insult? Why  
dost thou draw back? Why dost thou  
heart-milk to thee? Thou hast once  
thanked us for thy deliverance, as David  
in the Psalms. But thou comest and  
speak words that blaspheme, and  
say blasphemy.

The Lord of the Lords



2 E W

Q

# SERMON XI.

## The Conversion of St. Paul.

[The Second Sermon on this Text.]

1 COR. XV. 9, 10.

*For I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the Grace of God I am what I am: And his Grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain, but I laboured more abundantly than they all: Yet not I, but the Grace of God which was with me.*

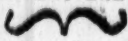


**A**FTER presenting you Vol. III. with a brief Scheme of the whole Chapter, I took notice, from these Words, of Three Things.

Q 2

I. What

## Vol. III.



I. What St. Paul was before his Conversion, *For I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God.*

II. His Conversion it self, *But by the Grace of God I am what I am.*

III. The Deportment of St. Paul after his Conversion, *The Grace which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain.*

I have done with my First Head, and proceed,

II. To the Conversion of St. Paul: In which we have these three Things; *First*, The Change wrought in him. *Secondly*, The Manner how this was effected.

*Thirdly*, The Reasons that mov'd God to convert him after so wonderful a manner.

*First*, As to the Change wherein his Conversion consisted, there are two Things in it worthy to be remark'd.

1. How Great, and
2. How Sudden it was.



1. How



1. *How Great.* This very St. Paul Ser. XI. tells us, That if any Man be in Christ,  he is a new Creature: Old Things are 2 Cor. 5. past away; behold, all Things are become 17. new. And certainly, never was this more eminently verify'd than in him himself. He was now in the full Career of Wick- edness, when he was stopt on a sudden by the astonishing Presence and Glory of our Lord. The Blindness of his Under- standing was immediately dispers'd, and he was overflow'd with Heavenly Light. The Hardness of his Heart was dissolv'd into Shame and Sorrow, Confusion and Contrition: His Enmity against Christ was converted into Love, and his Blas- phemies into Magnificats and Praises: His Madness and Rage against the Saints of God was now changed into a Tender- ness and Brotherly Affection towards them. And in a word, he now preaches every-where the Faith, which before he persecuted: He is no less zealous to propagate Christianity, than he was before to extirpate it: And he now thinks that all his Labours and Travails, and even his Sufferings and Blood, are too poor a Reparation for that Opposition his blind Zeal had rais'd against the Truths of Christ, and the Blood it had shed. How contemptible does all his Jewish

Vol. III. Learning appear to him now, in Comparison of the Excellency of the Knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord? How contemptible his Legal Righteousness, in Comparison of the Righteousness of God, which is by Faith in Christ Jesus? In one word; of a wilful, proud, furious, and bloody Pharisee, how is he become a meek, humble, patient, charitable, devout Christian? Contented now to be the Mark of that Pharisaical Rage, Malice, and Calumny, which he had before practis'd; contented now to be treated with Contumely and Reproach, and to be counted himself, as he had accounted the Disciples of our Lord, *the Filth of the World, and the Off-scouring of all Things. I am the least of the Apostles, that am not meet to be called an Apostle.* So far was he from being puff'd up either by the extraordinary Favours of God conspicuous in his Conversion and Revelations, or by his own Merit conspicuous in his Labours and Sufferings. The Remembrance of his Sins ever kept him humble; so humble, that one would have thought that there should have been no need of a *Thorn in the Flesh*: But frail is the best of Men. Thus far of the Greatness wrought in the Change of *St. Paul*: Let us reflect a little,

1 Cor. 4.  
13.

2 Cor. 12.  
7.

2. On

2. On the Suddenness of It. *St. Paul* Ser. XI. became Wise and Learned in the My-  
steries of Christ, not by long Study or Instruction, but in a Moment, by Inspiration. He arriv'd at the Perfection of Virtue, not by a long Discipline, not by repeated Trials, not by Dilligence, Circumspection, and Meditation; but by a sudden Infusion of abundance of Grace; his Soul was transform'd in a Moment, like our Saviour's Body on the Mount: *Luk. 9. 29.* His Eyes were no sooner dazzled by the Brightness of our Saviour's Glory, which eclips'd the Sun, than his Soul began to be overspread with a new Light and bright Day: He was no sooner cast down to the Earth, than his Soul was humbled within him: And no sooner did he hear the Voice of that Just One, than he cry'd out, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* *Acts 9. 6.* He was now ready to go to *Damascus* to be Baptiz'd, whither he was going before to Persecute: He was now ready to execute, not only with more Joy, but more Zeal too, the Commission which he had from our Lord, than ever he had done that from the High Priest. Therefore Saint *Luke* observes, *That straightway he* *Acts 9. 20.* *preach'd Christ in the Synagogues, that he is the Son of God.* This is a plain Account of the Suddenness of his Change,



Vol. III. which the History of his Conversion furnishes us with. And this agrees exactly with what he himself tells us of it; *But*  
 Gal. 1. 15, *when it pleas'd God, who separated me*  
 16, 17. *from my Mother's Womb, and called me by his Grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Heathen; immediately I conferred not with Flesh and Blood; neither went I up to Jerusalem, to them which were Apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and return'd again unto Damascus. Here was no human Instruction, like that of*  
 Acts 18. *Aquila and Priscilla, who expounded unto*  
 26. *Apollos the Way of the Lord more perfectly. Here was no gradual Progress towards Knowledge and Virtue, as in the Case of our Lord's Disciples, when he told them,*  
 Joh. 16. 12, *I have yet many Things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now; but all was effected by the Power and Grace of God in an Instant. From hence now 'tis easy for us to see,*

1<sup>st</sup>, How foolishly they talk, who represent infus'd Habits as a Contradiction. Why may not that God, who is the Fountain of Wisdom, communicate it in a Moment, as well as in a long Time? Why may not that God, who inspir'd into the Body of Adam, whilst it was yet Clay, a Living Soul, inspire into the  
 Gen. 2. 7. Soul

Soul it self Knowledge and Virtue? Ser. XI.  
 He that imparted, at *Pentecost*, to the *Apostles* in a Minute the Knowledge of various Languages, why can he not in a Minute possess the Understanding with a few great Truths? He that created *Cherubim* and *Seraphim*, whose Love, Divine Love, ever burns bright and strong, and ever did, why may he not inflame the Soul in a Moment with some Degrees of the same Divine Love? And shall not this in Perfection answer all the Ends of an acquir'd Habit? Shall Knowledge judge more uncertainly, or Love act more sluggishly and unsteadily, because 'tis infus'd in a Moment, and not attain'd by Degrees?

2dly, From hence we may learn, That if there were no other Arguments against a Death-bed Repentance than this, That the Change wherein Sanctification consists, cannot be so suddenly effected; that the Habits of Sin cannot be so soon worn out, or utterly effaced, at all but by a Habit of Virtue; and that this cannot be introduced, but by long Time, and repeated Acts: I say, if there were no stronger Argument against the Validity of a Death-bed Repentance than this, it could not weigh much. For is it not evident, that God can effect the greatest Change,

Vol. III. Change, if he thinks fit, in a Moment?   
 If it be said, 'Tis true, he can, but then it must be by supernatural Grace: I answer, This we must suppose, where-ever we suppose Conversion. Without this, they that are Well, can no more be sanctified than they that are ill; he that is at the Beginning, or Middle, no more than he that is at the End of Life; he that is in the Vigour of Health, no more than he that is Sick to Death. But if we look upon all, or at least, most of the Converts we read of in the Gospel, we shall find, that all the Change that was necessary to their Justification, was wrought in them in a Moment: Witness those Thousands converted, *Acts 2.* and indeed the *Samaritans, Lystrians, Iconians*, and all those, both *Jew and Gentile*, that were immediately converted at the first preaching of the Gospel, accompanied with mighty Miracles. Nor need I have recourse to those Times so long past, and enjoying such extraordinary Means. At this very Day, whoever believes, and repents, has pass'd that very Moment from Death to Life; from a State of Wrath, to a State of Favour. And though no Man doubts but that he who repents of his Sin, is bound afterwards to forsake it, and he that devotes him-

*Acts 14.*



himself to God and Holiness is bound af- Ser. XI  
terwards to make good his Vow; yet no  
Man doubts neither but that the Person  
thus repenting, and thus resolving, is in a  
State of Grace and Favour, even as soon  
as he has done so. I do not say this to  
countenance or encourage a Death-bed Re-  
pentance. I have Reasons enough to pro-  
duce, when there is Occasion, to prove  
it a doubtful, I had almost said, desperate  
Case: But this is not my present Business.

3dly, From God's working a Change  
in a Moment, as we have seen in the In-  
stance of St. Paul, we may easily infer  
how vainly they talk, who assert I know  
not what Purgative Fire, I know not  
what Trials and Probations, necessary for  
those who die in an imperfect State, e're  
they can be fit to enter into Heaven.  
Alas! How soon can the Presence of  
Christ, and the overflowing of his Spirit,  
transform a separated Soul from *Glory to*  
*Glory*? What Reluctances can it have  
against the Divine Will, which had sub-  
dued all Criminal Reluctancy before, and  
has now put off the Body, from which  
all Opposition grows? for 'tis *the Law in*  
*the Members warring against the Law of*  
*the Mind*, that captivates the Sinner,  
and hinders and retards the Convert or  
Babe in Christ. What Dulness, what  
Cold.

Rom. 7. 23.

Vol. III. Coldness, can the Soul now feel, that is filled with the Joy of his Master, and enlighten'd and enliven'd by the Exuberancy of the Spirit? Let us leave such kind of Opinions to such as are more fond of Reason than Revelation, and are apt to advance their Fancies and Projects instead of the Gospel.

Thus I have done with the *first* Thing that deserves to be consider'd in the Conversion of St. Paul, i. e. the Change wrought in him, and have sufficiently insisted on the Greatness and Suddenness of it. There is a twofold Practical Use to be made of this. The

*First* concerns Sinners. The *Second*, the Regenerate.

As to the *former*, let no Man's Heart fail him on the Account of the Difficulties which he is to conquer. 'Tis indeed a great Change, for the Proud to be humble, the Lustful chaste, the Passionate and Ill-natur'd meek and charitable; 'Tis a great Alteration, from the Love of Sin, to be converted into an Abhorrence of it; and from Carelessness and Insensibility, into a *Hunger and Thirst after Righteousness*. But then you ought to remember, that this Change is to be wrought by the Power and Spirit of God; that Power that chang'd *Publicans* and *Sadducees* in-

to Saints; that Power that opens the Ser. Xl.  
Eyes of the Blind, breaks in pieces the  
Rocks, and raises the Dead; that Power,  
in a word, that chang'd *Paul* in a Mo-  
ment from a Blasphemer and a Persecu-  
tor, into an Apostle and a Confessor. And  
though you are not to expect that God  
will manifest himself in the same out-  
ward, visible, and surprizing Glory to  
you, or that he will convert you by such  
a sudden and irresistible Force; yet he  
will vouchsafe you that Light and  
Strength that shall be truly supernatural,  
that shall be abundantly sufficient to ef-  
fect the great Work of your Regenera-  
tion. Be but you in earnest, and God  
will be ready: Do but what lies in you,  
and God will never be wanting to do  
the rest. Let no Man say then, I would  
fain escape the Wrath to come, and go  
to Heaven, if I could; but ah! *the Gate*  
*that leads to Life is too strait, and the*  
*Way too narrow* for me: I would fain  
overcome my Lusts, and become a new  
Man, if I could; but, alas! my Ene-  
mies are too many, and too mighty for  
me; Temptations are very great, and  
my Strength little; my Nature is cor-  
rupt, my Mind darken'd, my Heart hard  
and insensible, and my Sins, thorough a  
long Habit, absolute and uncontroula-  
ble:



**Vol. III. ble:** O wretched Man that I am! Who shall burst these Bonds? Who shall deliver me from the Body of this Death? *Rom. 7. 24*  
 Let no Man, I say, argue thus: But rather, the Mercy of God is boundless; the Son of God has died for us; the Spirit of God is promised us; the Gospel of Christ is preach'd to us, and we are invited, beseech'd, and intreated to return, and be reconciled to God. Let us therefore return to him; and let us assure our selves, that we shall never want either Mercy to pardon us, or Grace to help us in Time of Need. *Heb. 4. 16.* Heaven and Earth shall pass away; but the Words of Christ shall not pass away. *Mark 13. 31.*

Secondly, I must address myself to the Imperfect Christian. You have, peradventure, been long Converts, but your Growth, your Progress is little; and your Improvement is little, so is your Comfort and Joy little too. What means this? Has not our Lord promis'd; Ask, *Matt. 7. 7.* and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be open'd unto you? Is not this an essential part of the New Covenant, I will put my Law in their inward Parts, and write it in their Hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my People. And they shall teach no more every Man his Neighbour, and every Man

Man his Brother, saying, know the Lord, Ser. XL  
for they shall all know me, from the least  
of them unto the greatest of them. What  
then, will not God make good his Word?  
Or is the Lord's Hand shortned, that it  
cannot save? Is it not the same Grace of  
God, of which 'twas said, My Grace is  
sufficient for thee? And again, Not that  
we are sufficient of our selves to think  
any thing as of our selves, but our suf-  
ficiency is of God. I can do all Things  
through Christ which strengtheneth me.

'Tis certainly the same Grace, the same  
Spirit; but you are wanting to your  
selves, you are rather content to be in-  
nocent, than industrious to be perfect;  
You do not make Religion your Business;  
you are not importunate or incessant in  
Prayer; you are yet too Carnal, too  
Worldly; you indulge the Animal Na-  
ture too much; and therefore you feel  
neither that Strength nor Joy of the Spi-  
rit, which you otherwise would. Thus  
far of the Change of St. Paul: I proceed,

Secondly, To consider the Manner  
how it was wrought. St. Paul was now  
arriv'd at the Height of Wickedness and  
Cruelty, and one might have more na-  
turally expected that God should have  
met him rather in order to his Destru-  
ction than Conversion; that he should  
have

Vol. III. have been struck down, like *Antiochus*, into  
 ~~~~~ Torments of Body, and Despair of Mind,  
 than humbled into Contrition and Repen-
 Acts 1: 9. tance. *And Saul yet breathing out Threat-
 nings and Slaughter against the Disciples
 of the Lord, went unto the High Priest;*
 and having obtain'd Bloody Commissions
 from him, he resolv'd to put them in
 Execution in *Damascus*. In Prosecution
 of which Design, he had not only enter'd
 upon his Journey, but dispatch'd a
 great Part of it; for the Text observes,
 ver. 3. he was now come near *Damascus*, i. e. he
 had almost finish'd a Journey of six Days,
 when behold, suddenly there shin'd round
 about him a Light from Heaven, that is,
 the Glory of Christ, who vouchsafed to
 appear to him. How great was the Con-
 descention of our Lord, to appear to him
 in Glory, who had before rejected him
 for the Meanness and Contemptibleness
 of his Fortune! To convince and con-
 found him by his Majesty and Heavenly
 Splendor, whom he could not before
 convince by the Light of his Doctrine,
 and the Power of his Miracles! But now
 ver. 4. he fell to the Earth, he was not able to
 bear that Divine Appearance, it dazzled
 his Eyes, and astonish'd his Heart, and
 therefore he soon threw himself to the
 Earth, either out of Fear, Humility, or
 the

the natural Impotence of a Corruptible Ser. XI.
 Creature, or all together. In this Po-
 sture it was he *heard a Voice, saying unto* Acts 9. 4.
him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?
 The Humble are qualified for Heavenly
 Grace and Illumination: Now it was
 that *Christ*, who had before manifested
 himself to the Eyes of his Body, resolves
 to manifest himself to his Soul too, and
 fill that with Light and Grace. *Saul,*
Saul, vain corruptible Wretch, proud,
 furious, and sinful Pharisee, *Why perse-*
cutest thou me? They are my Saints, my
 Members, my Friends and Servants, my
 Favourites and Beloved Ones, whom thou
 do'st traduce, accuse falsely, imprison,
 scourge, and murder: I cannot but be
 tenderly-affected, and suffer in them,
 and must one Day revenge their Wrongs
 done to me. *Saul* answers, *Who art thou,* --- ver. 5.
Lord? that is, He had read of glorious
 Appearances of Angels, and did not
 know under what Character he was to
 consider this Person appearing to him:
 Or we may very well think he was un-
 der such Surprise and Disorder, that he
 did not so well reflect upon the Words
 of our *Lord*, as he might have done:
 Or, it may be, the Words themselves
 seem'd something doubtful to him, *Why*
persecutest thou me? He remember'd well
 R enough,

Vol. III. enough, that he persecuted the whole Church or Sect of Christians, but did not know that he had bent his Fury against any one single Person in particu-

Acts 9. 5. *lat. And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. I am Jesus, whom thou often in Contempt, hast called Jesus of Nazareth: I am that Jesus whom thou dost treat as an Impostor, and a Malefactor: I am he whose Doctrine thou hast rejected, whose Miracles thou hast blasphem'd, and the Blood of whose innocent Disciples thou hast unjustly shed: But it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. Thou dost rush blindfold upon thy own Destruction, and obstinately draw upon thy self Death and Damnation; for I am he to whom all*

Mat. 28.

18.

Mat. 21. 42.

== Jer. 44.

Acts 9. 6.

Power is given in Heaven and in Earth: 'Tis in me to save, or to destroy; I am the Stone which the Builders rejected, but is become the Head of the Corner. And whosoever shall fall on this Stone, shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to Powder. Then Saul, trembling and astonish'd, said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Now his Heart smote him; now his Zeal appear'd to him true Madness and Inhumanity; now the Consciousness of his Guilt, and the Terrors of God, seiz'd him, and he cries out,

Lord,

Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? He Ser. XI. was, I suppose, somewhat supported and strengthened by some inward Influence of the Spirit; and his Mind, it may be, told him, That *Christ* would not have thus gloriously appear'd to him, that he wou'd not with so much Condescension have expostulated with him, and stoop'd so far to convince him, meerly in order to destroy him. And he was now ready to embrace and acknowledge him upon any Terms: He was now dispos'd to make the best Reparation he could, for his Blasphemy, Persecution, and Injuriousness, whatever it should cost him: *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Injoin me what Labour and Travail thou thinkest fit, expose me to what Shame and Reproach thou wilt, and lay upon me more and greater Evils than I have occasion'd to others, if this may be accepted, I am prepar'd, and resolv'd to obey thee. *And* Acts 9. 6. *the Lord said unto him, Arise, (for he still lay groveling on the Earth, ashamed, afraid, and, it may be, counting himself unworthy to lift up his Head) and go into the City, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.* I will pursue this History no farther. *Christ* accepts him, and St. Paul obeys. His Blindness and the Cure of it by *Ananias*, his Prayer

Vol. III. and Fasting three Days, the weak and diffident Reasoning of *Ananias* with our Lord, the Vision of *St. Paul*, and, finally, his Baptism, are Things plainly enough set down. They would, indeed, afford us Matter for many instructing Reflexions, but I have not Time to go thorow with them.

I will conclude therefore this Branch of my Discourse, concerning the Manner of *St. Paul's* Conversion, with this one Observation: That this was all truly wonderful; and consequently, no Man ought to presume that his Unbelief and Ignorance shall be one time or other thus cured. There is no such Charm in Infidelity and Ignorance; there is no such Merit in a heady and cruel Zeal; nay, Uprightness it self, when it is heady and wilful, and polluted and defil'd by intolerable Errors, is not so amiable, that God should save such a One by extraordinary and astonishing Methods. We have *Moses* and the *Prophets*, *Christ* and his *Apostles*, speaking to us in the *Scriptures*; and if we hear not these, 'tis Impudence to expect an audible Voice from Heaven. If the Threats and Promises of God in his *Gospel*, if the mighty Miracles which *Christ* and his *Apostles* wrought, have no Influence upon us, in vain shall we expect

pect to be converted, by the Glory and Ser. XI. Majesty of a visible Appearance, or by the Expostulations and Arguments of *Christ* speaking to us from Heaven. It is true, rather than an upright Man should perish everlastingly for want of Means, I believe God would send him an Angel from Heaven; or, if it were needful, would appear a second Time in Glory to convert him. But this is a Supposition never to be granted, that an upright Man should want Means to save him. Such miraculous Ways of Conversion never can be necessary for the meer Salvation of one single Person. God never has left himself without a *Witness*; and he has several Ways to address himself to the Souls of Men. Nor, in the next Place, must the upright Man be such a one as *Saul*; but he must be careful of his Principles, as well as conscientious in acting consonant to them: He must examine himself and his Notions calmly and impartially: His Ignorance and Unbelief must not flow from Prejudices and Prepossessions, and a wilful, earthy, headlong, and ambitious Zeal. I pass on to the

Third Thing remarkable in the Conversion of *St. Paul*, namely, The Motives and Reasons which might induce God to

Vol. III. vouchsafe him this miraculous Conversion.
 And here I will not doubt to affirm,

1. That his Unbelief and Ignorance did much extenuate his Guilt; that his acting according to his Principles, and his being free from Hypocrisy, and several other vile Immoralities, which the *Pharisees* and Rulers were generally subject to; I say, I do not doubt, but this did very much recommend him to the Mercy and Compassion of God. But if this had been all that God had Regard to, I cannot see but that God might have wrought his Salvation several other Ways. Some terrible Judgment might have struck him to the Earth, as well as the Majesty of Christ; and when he was capable of hearing Truth, and judging impartially of the Evidence offer'd for it, God might have spoken home to his Heart by the common and usual Way. Nor can I see, in the next Place, how the Honour of the Divine Goodness had suffer'd, though such a One should have perish'd. *St. Paul* wanted not Means sufficient for his Conversion, without this wonderful Appearance; And had he been cut off by any immediate Judgment, he must have imputed his Ruin to himself, and confess'd, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and just are thy Judgments.* Therefore I affirm,

2. That

2. That in this miraculous Conver- Ser. XI.
 sion of St. Paul, God had especially re-
 gard to the Publick Good of his Church,
 and to the vast Benefit which Mankind
 was to reap from it.

1. As this was an Example of In-
 finite Goodness, and an Encouragement to
 the greatest of Sinners not to despair of
 Mercy. This he tells us himself, in
 those Words I have several times cited,
Howbeit, for this cause I obtain'd Mercy, 1 Tim. ii:
that in me first Jesus Christ might shew 16.
forth all Long-suffering, for a Pattern to
them which should hereafter believe on
him to Life Everlasting.

2dly, As that was a new Confirmation
 of the Truth of the Gospel. Nor could
 the Evidence of St. Paul be question'd,
 when he should bear Witness to this
 Glorious Appearance of Christ. His
 Uprightness and Integrity when a Pha-
 risee, his Zeal for the Traditions of the
 Fathers, his violent Persecution of Chri-
 stianity, were abundantly enough to give
 Force and Authority to his Testimony
 with all impartial Men. They could
 not but believe him, when they heard
 him preach the Faith which before he
 persecuted; they could not but conclude,
 when they reflected upon all Circum-
 stances calmly, that his Conversion was

Vol. III. effected in the Manner he related. Besides, that *this Thing*, as he tells King
 Act. 26. 26, *Agrippa, was not done in a Corner*; there
 were enough with him to attest the
 Matter of Fact; and his Blindness in
Damascus for three Days, together with
 the wonderful Cure of it by *Ananias*,
 was a Confirmation of the Whole, very
 publick, and very considerable. And all
 this was no more than necessary; since
 St. Paul was to bear Witness of the Re-
 surrection of *Christ*; since he was to be the
 Gal. 1. 15. great Apostle of the *Gentiles*; since he was
separated from the Womb for the great
 Work of propagating the Gospel, and esta-
 blishing the Kingdom of *Christ* thro' most
 of the Nations upon Earth. This was
 the great Reason why our Lord thought
 fit to distinguish him from, and raise him
 above the rest of Mankind, by such a
 peculiar Condescension and miraculous
 Conversion. This is plainly to be ga-
 ther'd from the Words of *Christ* to
 Act. 9. 15, *Ananias*; Go thy way; for he is a chosen
 16. Vessel unto me, to bear my Name before
 the *Gentiles, and Kings, and the Children*
of Israel. For I will shew him how great
Things he must suffer my Name's sake.
 And again, from the Words of *Ananias*
 to St. Paul; The God of our Fathers
 26. 22. 14, hath chosen thee, that thou shouldst know
 15. his

his Will, and see that Just One, and Ser. XI. shouldst hear the Voice of his Mouth. For thou shalt be his Witness unto all Men, of what thou hast seen and heard.

This being plain, the great Thing we are to infer from the Conversion of St. Paul, is, the Truth of Christ's Resurrection. What is it that either Jew or Gentile can oppose against the Testimony of this Apostle? The mighty Change wrought in him, and that so suddenly, his Zeal and Sufferings for the Christian Religion, do plainly prove, not only that he believ'd he saw Christ, but that he really did so. Or will any blasphemously say, That as his Miracles were wrought by the Finger of the Devil, so this Appearance was but an Angel of Darkness transform'd into an Angel of Light? Is it possible that God should suffer Man thus far to be impos'd upon? Or is it possible that an Evil Spirit should be able, not only to inflict Blindness in the Body, but in a Moment to infuse Grace into the Mind, and fill it with Virtue and Holiness? If such impious and frontless Surmises (or rather Fictions) as these may be admitted for Reason, I see not how it is possible for God himself to give Man a Satisfactory Evidence either of Fact or Doctrine. I

see

Vol. III. see not how 'tis possible for Man to distinguish Truth from Imposture, Right from Wrong. It remains then, that *Christ* is certainly risen; that he did as certainly appear to St. *Paul* after his Ascension, as he did to St. *Peter* and the rest of the *Disciples* before it.

How inexcusable then shall we be, if we reject the Testimony, and slight the Doctrine of an *Apostle* thus chosen, thus call'd, thus sent of God? And how much more inexcusable, if believing the Resurrection, we live as if there were none? I have done with the *Second* Thing contain'd in the *Text*, The Conversion of St. *Paul*; I shou'd now come to the

III. *Third*, The Deposition of Saint *Paul* after his Conversion. But I will not go about to enter into any particular Account of this: For,

1. 'Tis an endless Work. Who can reckon up the Sufferings, the Travails of this great *Apostle*? Who is able to set forth his Humility, his Zeal, his Simplicity and Godly Sincerity, his tender Compassion for the Flock of Christ, his profound Knowledge, his great Conduct and Skill in Government, his fervent and incessant Devotion, his Steadiness and

and Courage, his solid and mighty Elo- Ser. XI.
quence?

2. His Life is especially to be propo-
s'd as a Pattern to the Pastors of Christ's
Church; though it be also an Example
which all ought to write after, as far as
relates to the general Duties of Christia-
nity, according to those Words of his,
Be ye Followers of me, even as I also am 1 Cor. 11. 1.
of Christ. And again, Brethren, be Fol- Phil. 3. 17.
lowers together of me, and mark them
which walk so, as ye have us for an En-
sample.

From this very short View of his Life,
or rather Glimpse than View of it, we
may infer Two Things.

First, The Truth of the Gospel; for
'tis plain the *Apostle* could aim at no-
thing but a Reward in a Life to come;
and there was no Ground for this Hope
to be built on, but the Truth of the Go-
spel. A Life of such undesigning Sim-
plicity, of Mortification, and Labour,
and Sufferings, could never have been
supported by any Thing but the Cer-
tainty of a Resurrection.

Secondly, From the Life of St. Paul,
we may learn this great Truth; That
the Diligence and Zeal, the Vigilance
and Mortification of a Convert, ought, so
far as may be, to bear some Proportion
to

Vol. III. to the Sins and Crimes, to the Negligence
 and Carelessness of his Unregenerate State.

Luke 7. 47. *The Reason is plain, He to whom much is forgiven, ought to love much; and he who abounds in Love, will abound too in the Works of God.*

The End of the Eleventh Sermon.

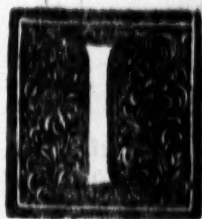


S E R M O N XII.

The Obdurate under no Incapacity
of Repentance.

J E R E M. v. 3.

*Thou hast stricken them, but they have
not griev'd; thou hast consum'd them,
but they have refus'd to receive Cor-
rection: They have made their Faces
harder than a Rock, they have refus'd
to return.*



Do not propose from hence Vol. III.
to give you an Account ei-
ther of the Danger, Na-
ture, or Causes of Obdu-
ration; but will content
my self at present, with speaking only to
the Capacity or Incapacity of the Obdu-
rate for Repentance.

And

Vol. III. And here, not to enter into a particular Examination of all that is urged to prove the Obdurate under an impossibility of Repenting, nor yet to dissemble the Difficulties which present themselves in this Question; I think it fit, briefly to put you in mind, *First*, That as to the Opinions of Men, they are so uncertain or contradictory on this Subject, that we can lay no Stress upon them: For I do readily acknowledge, That there are many, and those Learned Authors, who judge some Sorts of Obduration, at least, incapable of Repentance; and that there are others who chuse to suspend the Decision of this Matter, and to leave it as an uncertain and doubtful Question. *Secondly*, I do not deny, but that there are several Texts of Scripture which may seem to exclude some Sorts of Sinners from a Capacity of Repentance. Nor, *Thirdly*, That many do conceive, that some of the Primitive Fathers, and the Ancient Canons of the Church, give Countenance to that Opinion which excludes the Obdurate from Repentance. Yet after all, having weigh'd all the Reasons I could either find or think of, I cannot but resolve, that the Possibility of the Obdurate's Repentance is a Doctrine most agreeable to Experience and Reason,

Reason, to *Fathers, Councils, and Scrip-
ture.* 

1st, Therefore, (to remove those Difficulties I before mention'd, in as few Words as I can,) That some have thought fit to suspend their Opinion, and not decide this Question on one Side or other, is a Modesty to be commended; but when Necessity presses for a Decision, when the Interest of Souls solicites us to it, we must not forbear, lest we with-hold any Truth of God. I am, from my own Experience, sufficiently inform'd, that several do mistake their own Case for that of Obduration, and consequently, excluding themselves from the Hopes of Repentance and Salvation, have thrown themselves headlong into Despair; and therefore I have judg'd the Resolution of this Question necessary. And if it be here replied, That as the Assertion of the Impossibility of Repentance, may betray some into Despair; so the Assertion of its Possibility, may betray more into Presumption: I answer, The Danger of Obduration, and the Difficulty of Repentance in this State, are, without adding the Impossibility of it, sufficient Discouragements from Presumption. But if Men will make an
ill

Vol. III. ill Use of a Truth, 'tis their own Fault; there are never wanting such as turn the Grace of our God into Lasciviousness, and make the Merits of Christ, and the Mercies of God, the Occasions of their Security and Confidence. And yet this must not discourage the Ministers of the Gospel from publishing the one and the other.

Next, As to the Authority of such, who believe a State of Reprobacy and Obduration incapable of Repentance, I have Two Things to say;

1. That the contrary Opinion has the Advantage of being maintain'd by Authors more considerable, both in Number and Reputation.

2. That the former are not able to give us any constant or certain Notes or Characters, by which we may be able to declare what is a fretting and fatal Leprosy, and what not; to distinguish that State which they suppose incapable of Repentance, from those which are not.

2dly, As to the Scripture: Those Texts which seem to some utterly to exclude the Obdurate from the Capacity of Repentance, are either,

1. Such as seem to reject Repentance it self from a Pardon and a Blessing, as that

that of *Heb. 10. Prov. 1.* and elsewhere. *Ser. XII.*
And these, they themselves must acknowledge not to belong to this Question, as proving more than they intend. And whether they can find out the Way, or no, they must own that there is a Necessity of finding one, to reconcile these Places with innumerable plain Texts of *Scripture*, and the Catholick Doctrine of the Church, That whoever repents, shall be sav'd: A Doctrine so universally receiv'd, that whoever believes the Sin against the Holy Ghost unpardonable, does believe that the Commission of it renders the Sinner utterly unable to repent. Or else they are,

2. Such Places which speak not of the Obdurate's Incapacity of Repentance, but of the Impossibility of their obtaining Pardon by the Intercession of others: And these again, you discern, are nothing to the present Purpose. For it is a very different thing to say, that some Sins, or some States of Sin, are of that Nature, that God's Anger and Judgment against them cannot be diverted by the Interposal and Mediation of others; and to say that a Sinner, when he is arriv'd at such or such a State, is harden'd, and shut up under an Impossibility of Repentance. Or else,

S

3. There

Vol. III. 3. There are such Places which seem to speak an Impossibility of Repentance to total and downright Apostacy; such are *Heb. 6.* *1 Pet. 2.* and elsewhere. To which, besides what is commonly said, that these Texts are not to be understood of a natural Impossibility, but moral Difficulty; we may answer, That the Sense of *St. Paul* and of *St. Peter* is partly this; That they who did renounce Christ, were not to expect any other *Messias*, nor was there any other Sacrifice appointed for Sin, and therefore their Condition was desperate. And farther, That these Places are in part Prophetic, denouncing that Destruction which should suddenly overwhelm all Unbelievers and Apostates, as it actually did. Or, *Lastly*, They are such Places which speak not of Eternal, but Temporal Judgments, such is that of *Acts 8.* and many in the *Old Testament*. Now 'tis true, that Repentance it self cannot always prevent Temporal Judgments; but it can do more, it can turn them into Spiritual Blessings. But what is this to our present Purpose? They should urge us with Texts proving that such or such a sort of Men cannot repent, and they bring us such as speak of the Issue and Effect of Repentance in some Cases.

I have

Set. XII

I have nothing now to consider, but the Authority of some Primitive *Fathers* and Ancient *Councils*. To which I say, briefly, That none of these do talk of the Impossibility of Repentance, but the Impossibility of Pardon in some Cases: Nor did they mean the Pardon of God, but the Pardon of the Church. And the utmost they contended for was this, That though there was no Sin, nor State of Sins, which God could not, or would not pardon to the Penitent, yet there were many Cases wherein it was neither prudent nor safe for the Church to pronounce Absolution. And this again is very little to our present Question.

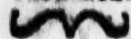
Having thus remov'd the Objections that lie against this Doctrine, in as few and plain Words as I could, I will now proceed to prove the Truth of it.

If the Obdurate are incapable of Repentance, this Incapacity must spring from one of these Two Things. Either,

First, The Nature of Obduration:
Or,

Secondly, The Will of God.

Vol. III.



I will therefore shew you,

First, That there is nothing in the Nature of Obduration, which does imply the Impossibility or Incapacity of Repentance.

Secondly, I will shew you, That it is not the Will of God, that the Reprobate or Obdurate should continue such, but that they should repent.

First, There is nothing in the Nature of Obduration, which does imply an Impossibility of Repentance. Those Metaphors in *Scripture*, by which the Obdurate or Hard-hearted are describ'd, are not to be expounded in their most rigorous Sense, and stretch'd to the utmost that the Figure will bear. Thus when Men are said to be of *Reprobate Minds*, to have *Eyes that cannot see*, and *Ears that cannot hear*, and *Hearts that cannot understand*; this is not to be understood as if they had utterly lost the Faculty of Understanding, or as if the Understanding had lost the Capacity of Judging; but only thus, That they have actually effac'd the Principles of Virtue, the Distinctions of Right and Wrong, Good and Evil; and consequently, that they are generally prone to approve and delight in Wickedness, and are very unfit

Rom. 1. 28.

Is. 44. 18.

Jer. 5. 21.

Rom. 11.

8.

fit to receive Instruction. So when Men **Ser. XII.**
 are said to be *past Feeling*, and to have a *seared Conscience*; this is not to be under-
Eph. 4. 19.
2 Tim. 4. 2.
 stood as if the Conscience was no more
 capable of being pierced than Flint or
 Marble; but only that the Conscience
 does not do its Office; that it has no
 tender Sense of the Good or Evil of
 Virtue or Vice; makes no Opposition
 before, nor feels any Remorse after the
 Commission of a Sin; nor is ordinarily
 or easily mov'd or awakened into Life
 or Sense. So, lastly, when Men are said
 to be *dead in Trespasses and Sins*, it is Eph. 2. 1.
 not to be suppos'd that they are incapa-
 ble of all Medicines and Spiritual Ap-
 plications as the Dead are, or that it is
 utterly impossible to recall them to
 Life again; but only this, That they
 are grown extreamly stupid, sensual, and
 brutish; that they do nothing that does
 testify a Spiritual Life; and that they
 cannot, without great Difficulty, be re-
 cover'd out of this State.

That all this is true, is evident from
 the Design and Drift of *Scripture*, from
 all its Sermons and Addresses to Sin-
 ners, and its manifest Power and Effi-
 cacy where-ever it was preach'd. Let
 the Obdurate be such as have *clos'd their*
Eyes, and stopp'd their Ears, the Pro-
 phet

Vol. III. phet *Isaiah* tells us, That Christ was
Ch. 85.
ver. 14. sent to *open the Eyes of the Blind, and to
 unstop the Ears of the Deaf.* Let them
 be suppos'd to be under the Dominion of
 Sin; the same Prophet tells us, That
Ch. 61. v. 1. Christ was sent to *proclaim Liberty to the
 Captives, and the opening of the Prison
 to them that are bound.* Let it be grant-
 ed, that they are *dead in Trespasses and
 Sins*; yet even to such does the Gospel
Eph. 5. 14. address its Calls and Invitations to Re-
 pentance, *Awake thou that sleepest, and
 arise from the Dead, and Christ shall give
 thee Light.* In a Word, this was the great
 Design which the preaching of the Gospel
Act. 26. 18. aim'd at, *To open Mens Eyes, and to turn
 them from Darkness to Light, and from the
 Power of Satan unto God.* And as this was
 the Design of the Gospel, we have not a few
 Instances of the Success and Efficacy of
 it. We have the Publicans and Sinners,
 not only the meanest, but the worst of
 Men, converted to the Faith. And in
 1 Cor. 6. we meet with such as are said
 in Rom. 1. to be given over to a Repro-
 bate Mind, actually wash'd, sanctified,
 and justified. Nor can I tell what can
 be said against this, unless you'll fancy
 that obdurate Pagans, or obdurate Jews,
 were indeed capable of Repentance, but
 not obdurate Christians. I confess, in-
 deed,

deed, that where the Light is brighter, Ser. XII. and the Obligations greater, there the Violence which must be offer'd to the Conscience, before it can be harden'd, must be greater too; and therefore I will readily grant, that as their Guilt is greater, so is their Repentance more difficult. But this still cannot amount to an Impossibility. I confess again, that the Pagan who had resisted the Light of Nature, and the Jew who had oppos'd that of the Law, had this Advantage, that there was still behind a greater Light, and more powerful Motives, I mean those of the Gospel; but to him who hardens himself against the Gospel, no clearer Revelation, nor more effectual Arguments, can be administer'd; and consequently, the State of an obdurate Christian is more hazardous than that of an obdurate Jew or Gentile: But all this amounts not still to an Impossibility. For still Mens Faculties remain in them the same; and such are the Changes in their Natures, and in their Fortunes, that the very same Inducements may prevail at one Time, which have been rejected at another. Things may be represented to a Man in a better Light, and with a better Advantage, or he may be in a better Capacity to conceive them at one

Vol. III. Time, than another. Men may meet with those Evils and Disappointments in a Course of Sin which they could not foresee, and did not fear; and they may discover that Beauty and Advantage in Holiness, which before, whilst they were led captive by some Lust, they either could not see, or would not consider. The Affections of Men may change, and be alienated from those Things to which they were enslav'd before, and then they may be more capable of Information and Instruction; and a new Light, breaking in upon the Mind, may beget new Resolutions in the Will, and by Degrees this Will may recover its Strength; Conscience may resume its Throne, and perform its Office.

Thus much may suffice to shew us, That there's nothing in the Nature of Obduration, which does imply an Impossibility of *Repentance*; and though the Recovery of a Christian be more difficult than that of a Jew or Pagan, yet recoverable he is. If this was not so, the Dispensation of the *Gospel* would be more severe than that of *Nature*, or the *Law*; and to be born in the Pale of the Church, as Things now stand, would rather be a Misfortune than a Blessing: For alas! no small Number grow

grow up into Hardness of Heart, without Ser. XII. being ever sensible of Religion, without ever making any Opposition at all against the Temptations of the Age; and as many are over-power'd by them without making any strong Opposition, and before ever Religion has taken any firm Root in them, though peradventure they may have had some slight Touches of it, and have made some weak and short Attempts for the obtaining of Holiness.

I now pass on to the *Second* Thing I propos'd to speak to, viz. To shew you, That it is not the Will of God the Obdurate should remain so, but that they should repent. And indeed this ought to be presum'd, unless some express Declaration of the Divine Will could be urged to the contrary; for the Mercy of God must not be restrain'd and limited by any other than himself. It is a certain Rule both in Divine and Human Laws, that those of 'em whose Matter is gracious and favourable, are to be interpreted in the largest and most diffusive Sense: How much more here, where God's Declarations of his Readiness to admit of a Reconciliation with Sinners, are express'd in the most unlimited and universal Terms. In a word, since there is

Vol. III. is only one sort of Sins that is by our Saviour excepted out of the general Promises of Grace and Mercy to Sinners, namely, Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost; it follows plainly, that the excluding any other from the Benefit of God's Grace and Mercy, is an injurious Addition to the Word of God, and a dishonourable Restriction and Limitation of his Goodness. 'Tis a receiv'd Axiom in Law and Reason, *Exceptio firmat regulam in non exceptis*, "An Exception to a Rule, confirms that Rule in Things not excepted." Therefore, where God has made but one, no Man must multiply Exceptions to his Goodness. Now though this is abundantly enough; yet for a farther Proof of this Truth, I will add these following Considerations.

1. If it was the Will of God that the Obdurate should not repent, then 'tis plain that he could neither exact Obedience from them, nor impute their Disobedience to them as their Crime. Nay, what would be more absurd, it would be in them Disobedience to the Will of God, to break off their Impiety; and to continue in it, would be Obedience; for this, upon the Supposal that he does not will or desire their Repentance,

tance, is an exact Conformity to his Will. Ser. XII. But that all this is directly repugnant to the Voice of God in Scripture, is too plain to need a Proof: For how often does God, both in the *Old* and *New Testament*, call and invite the worst of Men to return to their Duty? And how often does he upbraid and reproach them with their persisting and persevering in their Crimes? This puts me in mind of a *Second Consideration*.

2. God's Will or Desire that the Obdurate should continue so, is not consistent with the Methods of his dealing with them. With what Truth can it be said in Scripture, that God, wills the Salvation of such, if he do indeed will their Obduration? How can it consist with the Sincerity of God, to press, invite, and sollicit even the Obdurate themselves to Repentance, and to bewail their Obstinacy in resisting the Methods of his Grace and Mercy, if it be at the same time his absolute and peremptory Will that they should reject and resist them? Finally, How can it consist with the Wisdom, Goodness, or Sincerity of God, to give them such Time to repent, if he knows their Repentance is impossible, or resolves it shall be so? But you'll say, What Foot-steps have we of this

Vol. III. this Dealing of God towards the Odur-
 rate and Reprobate? I answer, Innume-
 rate, both in the *Old and New Testa-*
 ment; but I will content my self with one
 full and plain one: *Knowing this first,*
 2 Pet. 3. *that there shall come in the last Days Scof-*
 3. 4. *fers, walking after their own Lusts, and*
saying, Where is the Promise of his Com-
ing? for since the Fathers fell asleep, all
Things continue as they were from the
Beginning of the Creation. To which,
 amongst others, St. Peter gives this An-
 1-Ver. 9. *swer, The Lord is not slack concerning*
his Promise, (as some Men count Slack-
ness,) but is long-suffering to us-ward,
not willing that any should perish, but
that all should come to Repentance. In
which Instance there are Four Things
very plain:

1st, That the Men here spoken of,
 were not only Reprobate and Obdurate,
 but even of the highest Rank of such;
 Men not only destitute of Goodness, but
 Enemies to it; nay, not only Enemies
 to practical Goodness, but the profess'd
 Adversaries to the fundamental Truths
 of the Gospel; they walk'd after their own
 Lusts, and were Scoffers; and the Truth
 they impugn'd and rallied, was nothing
 less than a Judgment to come, *Where is*
the Promise of his Coming, &c.

2^{dly},

2dly, It is evident, that these were **Ser. XII**
not obdurate Pagans or Jews, but obdu-
rate Christians. This is plain from the
last Times, wherein it is foretold that
these should come, and from the Truths
which they endeavour'd to ridicule and
discountenance.

3dly, 'Tis plain, that even towards
these God us'd much Long-suffering and
Patience: For by *us-ward*, is to be un-
derstood Mankind in general, and more-
especially in this Place, the most wicked
Part of them: For neither the Apostles,
nor any other holy and righteous Mem-
bers of the Church can be here under-
stood, as not being the Objects of *Long-
suffering*.

Lastly, 'Tis evident, that the Aim and
Design of God, in this his Patience, was
the Repentance and Reformation even of
such as these. This is asserted in so
many express Words, *Not willing that
any should perish, but that all should come
to Repentance*.

And thus, I think, I have so plainly made
out what I took upon me, To shew you,
that the Obdurate are under no Incapacity
of Repentance, that it would be superflu-
ous for me to add any thing more upon
this Head; otherwise, it were easy for me
to enlarge upon the Absurdities and the
Mischiefs

Vol. III. **Mischiefs** that flow from the contrary Doctrine, which, if it was true, would make it scarce possible for us to preach Repentance to any habitual Sinner. I will therefore only remove Two Objections which may occur to what has been said, and so conclude this Discourse.

1st, Has not God withdrawn his Spirit from the Obdurate? He has so, as to the Spirit's Residence and Abode in them; but does it hence follow, that the Spirit will never more make any Attempts upon them? What says St. Stephen, *Acts 7. 51. stiff-necked and uncircumcised in Heart and Ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost. Their resisting the Holy Ghost, does at once clearly evince both the Jews Obduration, and the Efforts of the Spirit to subdue and master it. But it is objected,*

2^{dly}, Was it not the Will of God that Pharaoh should continue in his Obduration; and, by Consequence, was he not incapable of Repentance? No, by no means: Nor had this ever enter'd the Imagination of any Men, had it not been for their mistaking that Place of St. Paul, *Rom. 9. 17. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same Purpose have I rais'd thee up, that I might shew my Power in thee, and that my Name might be declar'd throughout*

throughout all the Earth. Now we shall Ser. XII.
easily discern the Sense of these Words, if we consider the Place here referr'd to in *Exod. 9.* which whosoever will consider will find, that the Design of God, in those Words of *Moses* to *Pharaoh*, was to reproach him with the Hardness of his Heart, and to perswade him to relent, and let his People go: For it is plain that *Pharaoh*, after this Menace, and the Plagues which were accordingly inflicted, did relent, and actually let the People go; though afterwards, upon a new Temptation, he relaps'd into his former State. You will say then, What is the Meaning of the Place? Plainly this;
“ Do'st thou yet harden thy self against
“ me, and exaltest thy self against my
“ People? Assure thy self, that if thou
“ persistest in this Way, I will finally be
“ glorified in thy Ruin. For, deceive not
“ thy self; that I have hitherto inflicted
“ but remote Evils, and touch'd neither
“ thy Life nor Crown, proceeds not ei-
“ ther from an Inability to inflict Judg-
“ ments suitable to thy Sin, or from any
“ Design to spare thee, but out of a
“ Design to glorify my self: This is
“ the Reason why I have preserv'd thee
“ hitherto alive, that my Power and
“ Glory might be the more visible and
“ conspicuous

Vol. III. “ conspicuous in those multiplied Judgments, which I have already inflicted upon thee, and which I will inflict hereafter : For assure thy self, that except thou repentest, thou shalt not escape, but shalt fall under heavier Judgments. My former have been upon thy Cattle, thy Rivers, thy Fields, and thy Houses; but those to come shall be upon thy Children, thy Servants, thy People, and thine own Heart or Life.

Now, if any One, from those many Arguments which God makes use of to induce *Pharaoh* to repent, shall conclude he was incapable of repenting; or if any One can think, that, as a Motive to his Repentance, God took Care to inform him by the Mouth of *Moses*, that it was impossible for him to repent; I must confess this way of Reasoning is so unaccountable to me, that I doubt I shall never find an Argument to persuade him to reject any Error which he has a mind to believe.

The End of the Twelfth Sermon.

S E R M O N XIII.

Of Mourning for Sin, and the
Blessing it is entitled to.

MATT. v. 4.

*Blessed are they that mourn; for they
shall be comforted.*



AS if there were no other Vol. III.
World, we judge of Hap-
piness by our Success in
this: And as our Lives, so
our Opinions are form'd
and modell'd by Sense, not Faith: And
therefore we judge Them happy, who,
T like

Vol. III. like the Wicked, in the Expression of
 the *Psalmist*, flourish like a green Bay-
 tree, whose Fortunes equal their Ambition, and whose Plenty cannot be exhausted by their Luxury. Happy are the Rich, the Great, the Honourable! But our Saviour, who came down from another World, who knew how far the Happiness of Heaven exceeded that of Earth, who knew by what Rule his Father would proceed in dispensing his Eternal Favour, judges of every thing here Below by its Subserviency to our Eternal State Above, and forms his Opinion of Mens Happiness or Misery according to that relation they stand in to another Life: And therefore, quite contrary to the World, he does first pronounce them happy, whose outward Condition seems most full of Pity, whose Life is a Conflict with Calamity and Distress. Happy are the Poor, the Persecuted, the Afflicted! *Blessed are they that mourn.* Not as if Trouble was desirable for its own sake, as if Affliction was a Pleasure, and Misery a Happiness; but because our Afflictions have a direct tendency to Happiness: The Toil of the Afflicted, like that of the Labouring Man, is in order to a Reward; and the Sorrow and Travail

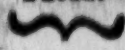
Travail of the Mournful Soul, like the *Sermon*
 Pangs and Agonies of the Departing One, *XIII.*
 do make Way for its Liberty and Glory,
 for its Happiness and Pleasure. There-
 fore 'tis our Saviour pronounces the
Mourner Blessed, not for the Affliction,
 which is the Cause of it, but for the
 Joy and Comfort which is the Reward
 of it.

But besides these, there are a second
 sort of *Mourners*; they who *mourn* un-
 der the Sense of their Sins. This *Mourn-*
ing has not only a tendency to Righte-
 ousness, but 'tis it self a part of the
 Righteousness of a Christian; and there-
 fore, being more immediately intitled to
 a *Blessing*, we may rationally suppose that
 our Saviour principally intends to pro-
 nounce these *Blessed*. I shall speak there-
 fore now of this sort of Mourning, and
 shew you,

- I. That Sin is a just Cause of *Mourn-*
ing and Sorrow. As,
- II. That our Mourning for Sin will
 procure our Comfort.

Vol. III.

I. That Sin is a just Cause of *Mourning* and *Sorrow*. Sin is certainly the greatest Plague that Human Nature is capable of suffering; It bereaves us of all that is a solid and lasting Good, and betrays us into a State full of the most dreadful Evils; it robs us of all the Comforts and Advantages which the Patronage and Favour of an Almighty Power might give us reason to pretend to; it robs us of the Hopes and Consolation which we might otherwise have in *Jesus*, for it excludes us from all Interest in his Merits and Sufferings, in his Government and Intercession; it robs us of the Pleasure and Satisfaction which a Virtuous Life and Peaceful Conscience fills the Soul of Man with; it robs us, *lastly*, of our Heaven; and instead of all these unspeakable Goods, which Sin bereaves us of, it brings upon us great and intolerable Evils. It scares us with Guilt, the Guilt of transgressing the wise, and just, and gracious Laws of God, notwithstanding the evident and undeniable Convictions of our own Minds; it wounds us with Shame and Reproach for our Ingratitude and Folly; for our Ingratitude, in forsaking God, who has by most astonishing

nishing Ways express'd a most unspeak-
 able Good-will and Love towards us; in XIII.
 forsaking our Blessed Lord and Master, 
 who lov'd us, and *laid down his Life for* John 3.
us; in resisting and grieving the Good 16.
 Spirit of God, which has often attempt-
 ed to fill our Minds with Righteousness,
 and Peace, and Joy; and in *despising the*
Goodness and Long-suffering of God, and
 being harden'd by his Mercies: For our
 Folly, in *forsaking God, the Fountain of* Jer. 2. 13.
Living Waters, and hewing our selves out
Cisterns, broken Cisterns, that can hold no
Water; for our Folly, in acting repug-
 nant to our Reason, and our true In-
 terest.

In the *next* place, Sin harasses and tor-
 tures the Minds of Men with tumultu-
 ous and ungovernable Passions, which,
 like Vapours and Winds in the Bowels of
 the Earth, cause Trembling and Convul-
 sion where they dwell, rending and tear-
 ing Men by Strife, Malice, and Conten-
 tion, burning 'em by Lust, racking and
 distending 'em by Ambition and Cove-
 tousness, and making 'em consume and
 pine away by Discontent and Envy.

In the *Third* place it delivers us to the
 Power and Empire of those Devilish Spi-
 rits which are the great Enemies of Man-

Vol. III. kind; and therefore, *lastly*, Sin will deliver us over to all the Miseries of Hell. We must have the same Portion with those Devils whom we have chosen to imitate, with those Devils whose Kingdom we have advanced, and to whose Dominion we have by Sin deliver'd up our selves. When a true Sense of this is imprinted on our Spirits, it cannot but produce a most killing Sorrow. What is our greatest Plague, should be our greatest Trouble; what is the most dreadful Mischief, should give us the most sensible Affliction. A Departed Friend, tho' he be but gone into a far Country, into another World, though he retain his Friendship, and we are to meet again when the Hurry of this World is over, and we are at leisure to enjoy one another, does yet leave a very melancholy Memory of him behind: And shall not a Departed God, whom we shall never see but in the Angry Day of Judgment, wound and afflict our Souls?

If in the Heat and Transport of a Passion we should affront, dishonour, and outrage in the highest manner a Friend dearer to us than a Brother, a Friend who had lov'd us with the sincerest Passion, and who (to say no more) had

had testified this his Passion for us by Sermon the Hazard of his Life and his Fortune; **XIII.**
 should we not, when we came to our selves, when we were dispossest of our Folly and Madnes, grieve and afflict our selves for any Suffering we had brought upon him, for any Wound we had made either in his Person or his Honour? Surely, if we had any human Nature, any Goodness of Temper, his Sufferings would be as painful to us as if they were our own: And yet the Friendship that is between the most tried, intimate, and passionate Friends, will not bear any Comparison with the Love of *Jesus* to us. For how much did he humble himself, that he might expresse his Love towards us, *Being in the Form of God, he took upon himself the Form of a Servant* Phil. 2. 6, 7. And in this Degree of Humility what did he not do, what did he not suffer for us? What Temptations did he not contend with, and overcome? What Reproach and Contempt, what Thirst and Hunger, what Labour and Travail, what tedious Watchings did he not endure for us? How often did he pour forth his Soul in Prayer for us? How often did he caution us against all the Snares of the Devil and the World? And when,

Vol. III. at last, there remain'd nothing more to be done, he parted with his Life and Blood for us in the Agonies of the Garden, and the Wounds of the Cross. After all this, can an ungrateful Sinner, led on by blind and senseless Lusts and Passions, not only forget and despise the Love of our Dear Lord, but proceed even to hate and outrage him, to dishonour and reproach him, to defy and renounce him, and, as much as in him lies, oppose and subvert his Kingdom, that he may establish the Kingdom of the Devil? Can (I say) an ungrateful Sinner, instigated by a vile Passion, do all this to our Saviour, who lov'd us, and shed his Blood for us, and when he comes to himself, when he comes to a Sense and Sight of what he has done, *Shall not his Soul weep in secret Places? Shall not his Eyes run down with Tears?* Shall he not express his Shame and Trouble, in the Behaviour and the Language of a broken and a contrite Heart?

If a Cruel and Insolent Enemy should lay waste our City, and fill our Native Country with Blood and Ruin; if Vipers bred amongst us should gnaw their Passage through our own Bowels, and establish their Usurpations upon the Sub-
version

version of our Government, and Viola-Sermon
tion of our Laws and Liberty, would **XIII.**
not our Hearts bleed to see it? Would
not our Souls sit in Darknes and Me-
lancholy within us? And shall the De-
vil, the Enemy of Mankind, scatter his
Death and Ruin over our Souls? And
shall our own traiterous Appetites and
Passions subvert the Discipline of God
within us, and establish their Tyranny
upon the Ruin of our Reason and Con-
science within us, and shall not our *Eyes*
run down with Tears? Shall not our
Souls be afflicted and *mourn* within us?

Lastly, Have we Tears to spend up-
on the Temporal Calamity of our Friend,
upon the Funeral of the Body; and can
we see our selves reduced to a State infi-
nitely more deplorable, (for Sin subjects
us to the Wrath of God, and consequent-
ly Eternal Damnation and Death,) and
shall we feel no Trouble, no Agonies,
no Sorrows in our Souls?

If we did thus entertain a true No-
tion of Sin; if we did seriously lay to
Heart what it is, what the Happiness is of
which it robs us, what the Misery into
which it plunges us, we should easily de-
termine, That it became us to *mourn*
for our Sins. We should not endlessly
dispute

Vol. III. dispute how sensible, how pungent our Sorrow ought to be; we should not weigh in a Scale the Measure and Duration of this Godly Sorrow: The Sense of our Souls would abundantly express it self in the most melancholy Language, and we should never think our Sorrow were great or lasting enough. Which Perswasion will be much confirm'd in us, if we look upon the Examples of Penitent Men in the Old and New Testament.

Pf. 6. 6.

Pf. 38. 3.
4, 5, 6.

Look upon David's Penitential Psalms, and then tell me what sort of Grief becomes the Sinner. *I am weary with my Groaning; all the Night make I my Bed to swim; I water my Couch with my Tears. There is no Soundness in my Flesh, because of thine Anger; neither is there any Rest in my Bones, because of my Sin. For mine Iniquities are gone over mine Head; as an heavy Burden, they are too heavy for me: My Wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my Foolishness. I am troubled, I am bow'd down greatly; I go mourning all the Day long.* You see how David behav'd himself under the Sense of his Sins; how he complains of the Weight, of the Number of them; how his Sorrow kept him waking by Night, and mourning by Day. Was his Light clearer

clearer than that of the Gospel? Had Sermon
 he a fuller Knowledge of God's Love to **XIII**
 Mankind? Or were God's Demuncia-
 tions against Sin more dreadful then,
 than they are now? 'Tis true, indeed,
 in the Matter of *Uriah* his Sin was
 great; but if we consider his Integrity
 and Zeal in all the other parts of his
 Life, from his Youth up, and compare
 it with our Negligence and Coldness in
 the greatest parts of our Lives, and then
 add our manifold Falls, our manifold
 Relapses, and, peradventure, many Pre-
 sumptuous Sins that we have been guilty
 of, and, I believe, the best of us
 shall have little reason to think our-
 selves more innocent than the Royal
 Prophet; and consequently, we should
 see but little Reason why our Sorrow
 should be less than his. *St. Peter*, when
 he had seriously reflected upon what
 Christ had said, and what he had done,
 went out, and wept bitterly. How full
 of Humility and Sorrow is the Depart-
 ment of *Mary Magdalene*? And behold, a
 Woman in the City, which was a Sinner,
 when she knew that *Jesus* sat at Meat in
 the Pharisee's House, brought an Alaba-
 ster Box of Ointment, and stood at his
 Feet behind him weeping, and began to
 wash

Mar. 26. 75.

Luke 7. 37.

38.

Vol. III. wash his Feet with Tears, and did wipe them with the Hair of her Head, and kissed his Feet, and anointed them with Ointment.

And according to this, the Discipline of the Primitive Church, did, by its Strictness and Severity in this Point, testify what kind of Repentance, what measure of Sorrow Sin called for at our hands. They did not think that Sin was an Offence of that slight Nature, as that it could be expiated by a short Confession, by a melancholy Reflexion or two; but they set apart Days and Years for this great Work: This was their first and greatest Work, to reconcile themselves to God by Repentance, a Repentance very intense, very sincere, very lasting.

Having thus made out, That Sin is a just Cause of Mourning and Sorrow; it remains I should go on to shew you, according to my propos'd Method.

II. That Sorrow for Sin naturally tends to procure our Comfort. Which will easily appear from these following Considerations:

First, It procures our Reconciliation with God.

Secondly,

Secondly, It improves and advances Righteousness towards Perfection. XIII.

Thirdly, It gives a Man an humble Assurance before God.

To all which we may add,

Fourthly, The greater our Sorrow for Sin, the greater will be our Glory hereafter.

First, It procures our Reconciliation with God. This is plainly the whole Import of the Gospel; this is the End and Design of it, To declare God's Readiness to pardon us, upon Condition of Repentance. *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath appointed me to preach the Gospel to the Poor; he hath sent me to heal the Broken-hearted, to preach Deliverance to the Captives, and recovering of Sight to the Blind, to set at Liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable Year of the Lord.* And this was the Way of God's dealing with Mankind from the Beginning. For thus we have God discouraging in the Prophet Jeremy, concerning the Sorrow of Ephraim; *I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, Thou hast chastis'd me, and I was chastis'd, as a Bullock unaccustom'd to the Yoke;* Luk. 4. 18. ch. 31. 18. 19.

Vol. III. *Yoke*: Turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the Lord my God. Surely after that I was turned I repented, and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my Thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the Reproach of my Youth. And then the Almighty, like a kind Father, when he saw him return'd from his Error, return'd from his Wrath too; and when he look'd upon him dressed in the conquering Charms of repenting Tears, it kindled in him Divine Kindness and Compassion. *Is Ephraim my dear Son? Is he a pleasant Child? For since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my Bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have Mercy upon him, saith the Lord.* Such is the Divine Nature, that a holy Sorrow is the richest Sacrifice; nothing so victorious and prevalent with God as an humble Grief, as we see in the Case of the repenting *Publican*: His afflicted Heart and dejected Eyes had more Power with God, than the vain-glorious Services and pompous Prayer of the *Pharisee*. And there is a plain Reason for it: For though our Sorrow cannot make sufficient Compensation for Injuries done to infinite Majesty;

Ver. 20.

Luke 18.

sty; yet 'tis all the Compensation we Sermon
 can make, and 'tis the only Course we XIII.
 can take to do God Right, to assert the ~
 Justice and Wisdom of his Laws, the
 Goodness and Munificence of his Nature,
 by taking Shame to our selves, and ac-
 knowledging our Folly and Baseness too,
 in our transgressing his Commands: And
 therefore 'tis the *Psalmist* at once mag-
 nifies the Goodness of God, and the
 Excellence of Repentance; *The Sacri-* Ps. 51. 17
fices of God are a broken Spirit: a bro-
ken and a contrite Heart, O God, thou
wilt not despise. Ah, Happy Sorrow!
 to be belov'd above the Joys of Luxury
 and Honour; more beautiful than all
 the Pomps and Glory of a triumphant
 War, or wanton Peace; since it engages
 God, and renders us the dear Objects of
 Divine Love. For what can we not
 hope for, from a sincere Love, back'd and
 invested with infinite Power? How hap-
 py are those Tears, which, like *Bethes-*
da's troubled Waters, heal by being dis- John 9.
 turb'd! Happy those holy Sighs and
 Groans, which, like the Wings of An-
 gels, fan the Soul into Regions far above
 all Earthly Tempests! Happy are those
 Retirements, wherein, while we con-
 demn our selves, and while our Sorrow
 with-

Vol. III. withdraws us from the Pleasures of the World, we are enroll'd in the Book of Life, and list'd in the Choirs of Angels and glorified Saints! We shall certainly acknowledge those Hours of our Lives to have been well spent, which we devoted to a pious Grief, when we shall see that those Moments of Sorrow have purchas'd for us an Eternity of Joy, and that Disrelish of sensual Pleasures, which a holy Sorrow begot in us, has at once sharpen'd our Appetites for spiritual ones, and purchas'd for us too, full Tides of Pleasure to entertain them.

Gal. 6. 14.

1 Epist. 1.
3.

Secondly, Sorrow for Sin advances the Christian on towards Perfection. The Perfection of a Christian consists in two Things: The *first* respects the Lusts of the Outward Man, namely, *Mortification*. The *second* respects the Affections of the Inward Man, namely, the *having our Conversation in Heaven*. These two do raise Man to the most elevated pitch of Christianity, when he can say with St. Paul, *The World is crucified unto me, and I unto the World*; or, with Saint John, *Our Fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ*. All this implies such a degree of Love for God
and

and our Saviour, for Heaven, and the Sermon
Righteousness thereof, as produces these **XIII.**
Two happy Effects:

1. It doth not only restrain us from an unreasonable Dotage upon the World, and the Things of it, but also begets in us a Contempt of them. We do not only cease to value them above, or equally with the Things of God; but they begin to appear to us so mean, and trifling, and contemptible, that we disgust and disrelish them, and grow weary of 'em. This 'tis to be crucified to the World, and to have the World crucified to us. Then is the Soul of Man made truly free; then is it enter'd into its Peace and Rest; then doth it not only forsake Sin, but loath and abhor it, and every Appearance of it, or Approach towards it. A

2. Effect, which this Degree of Love produces, is this, It makes us do the Will of God, and submit to it not only with Patience and Perseverance, and without Difficulty, but with Fervency and Delight, and an uninterrupted Constancy. An Example of which you may see in all the genuine Followers of our Lord and Master. When the Soul is once arriv'd at this Height, then doth it begin to long for its Delivery from the Body;

Vol. III. Body; then doth it live by Faith, thirsting after the Fruition of God, and our Saviour, and Heaven, and the Angelical Righteousness and Charity of that blessed Place.

Luke 7.

Now this is the State to which Mourning for Sin doth naturally tend to advance Man; for the more we discover the Loathsomeness of Sin, the more sensible shall we grow of the Love of God in pardoning it; and by a natural and necessary Consequence, the more fervently shall we love God; for you know the Resolution of our Saviour, *He loves much, to whom much is forgiven.* In this Contemplation of Things, the humble and contrite Sinner is ravish'd with Admiration of the Divine Goodness, and the Soul then bleeds afresh, to think whom it has offended. And thus a holy Love and holy Sorrow do mutually and interchangeably beget and cherish each other; and both these again do encrease the Sinner's Detestation of his Sin, and of all those Temptations that have betray'd him to it. It is impossible that That Heart which is wounded by its Reflexions of having offended God, should have any other Passion for those Things that instigated him to the Offence, than Loathing

Loathing and Abhorrence. It is impos- Sermon
sible that those Eyes that are fill'd with XIII.
Tears for Sin, should look with Kind-
ness or Delight upon those Things that
are Allurements to it. And as Godly
Sorrow breeds in us a Detestation and
Loathing of those Things which before
enticed and tempted us, so surely, God-
ly Love must breed in us a Contempt
of all these Things Below. How can a
Soul, that is fill'd and ravish'd with Di-
vine Love, see any Thing Here that it
can delight in, unless it be the Saints
that are upon the Earth; Creatures that
have the Image of God stamp't upon
them, that are adorn'd with some re-
flected Rays of his Glory and Beauty?
How can that Soul dote upon a tem-
poral Good, a fleeting Apparition, that
is swallow'd up in the Contemplation of
Eternity? How can that Soul dote upon
the faint Images, and rude Draughts of
Good it meets with in this World, which
is fill'd with the Love and assur'd Hope of
the perfect, solid, and substantial Goods
of another World? These are the hap-
py Effects of Godly Sorrow: It en-
creaseth our Detestation of Sin, our Dis-
relish and Contempt of Worldly Things,
our Love of God and Heaven. What

Vol. III. a lofty Height does this humble Soul
 soar! How glorious and true a Liberty
 is it, in which this blessed Sorrow doth
 inflame Man! How beautiful and truly
 Partaker of a Divine Nature does it make
 him! And therefore,

Thirdly, This Sorrow for Sin gives a
 Man an humble Assurance before God.
 126. 5. *He that sows in Tears, shall reap in Joy.*
 For Godly Sorrow doth wash off the
 Guilt which the poor Sinner contract-
 ed, and so doth by degrees ease the Soul
 of the Weight it groans under, and cheer
 and encourage it in its Approaches to-
 wards God. This must necessarily be
 the Effect of a holy Sorrow, not only
 upon the Account of those gracious Pro-
 mises which God has made to the Peni-
 tent, and upon the Account of those nu-
 merous Examples wherein we may be-
 hold these Promises made good to Sin-
 ners; but also on this Account farther,
 That this Sorrow changes and transforms
 us into the Image of God.

Let us consider these Things a little,
 and see what Comfort and Peace the
 Soul may extract from them. When
 the Soul is cover'd with Tears, and
 with humble Shame, how solid a Com-
 fort

fort does it reap from that of the *Psal-Sermon*
mist, The Sacrifices of God are a broken XIII.
Spirit: A broken and contrite Heart, O 
God, thou wilt not despise! I am he, *Ps. 51. 17.*
 therefore, may such a one say, whom
 God will not despise, i. e. whom he
 will delight in: I am that Sacrifice of
 a sweet savour that is acceptable to
 God: Blessed be thou, O God! who
 by thy Truth and thy Spirit hast wrought
 in me that gracious Frame and Temper of
 Soul which thou art pleas'd with. Bles-
 sed be thou, O *Jesus!* who hast reveal-
 ed the Will of God to me, and purchas'd
 this Grace for me. And Blessed be thou, O
 my Soul! that thou delightest not in the
 Sports and Pleasures of Sin, but in the
 Peace and Joy of a Godly Sorrow.

This is the Comfort that grows from
 general Promises: But 'tis possible we
 may find our own Case more fully ex-
 press'd in particular Instances. As thus:
 Have we been back-sliding Children?
 So was *Ephraim*; such was the Prodi-
 gal Son. And if our Repentance imi- *Jer. 31.*
 tate theirs, as our Falls have done *Luke 15.*
 theirs, we are, like them, receiv'd with
 Joy. Have our Sins been many? Were
 they grown habitual? Were they of a
 crying and provoking Nature? So were

Vol. III, all the Sins of *Israel* and *Judah*; such
 were the Sins of *Manasseh*; such were
 the Sins of *David*, in part, too; such
 were the Sins of the *Corinthians*: And
 yet all these have been *sanctified, cleansed,*
and justified. And since I have to do
 with the same God; since I have the
 same Promises; and since, finally, I feel
 in me the same humble and devout Sor-
 row, how should I question my Recon-
 ciliation? *Why art thou cast down, O my*
Soul? And why art thou disquieted within
me? O put thy Trust in God, and in
 the Son of God, the Mercy of the one,
 and the Merits of the other, and thou
 can'st not perish. *Why art thou cast*
down, O my Soul? And why art thou dis-
quieted within me? Do'st thou not feel in
 thy self the Operation of his blessed
 Spirit? Do'st thou not see *Jesus* form'd
 in thee? And do'st thou not know, that
 whom he *sanctifies* he *justifies*, and whom
 he *justifies* he *glorifies*? His Spirit and
 his Truth, his Love and his Fear, im-
 planted in thee, are the unquestionable
 Pledges of his Favour. Enter then *into*
thy Rest, O my Soul; the Lord has ac-
 cepted thine Offering; he has seen thy
 Sorrow; he has heard thee bewailing
 thy Sin, and he hath heal'd thee; he
 hath

hath put away all his Displeasure; with Sermon Loving-kindness he will comfort thee, XIII. and with Eternal Favour will he shine upon thee. For a Ransom is found for such as thee, even *Jesus*, who is a Propitiation for thy Sins. Thus we see how an Assurance before God naturally arises from Sorrow for Sin, and what an unspeakable Comfort this Assurance gives us. But farther: We are to remember,

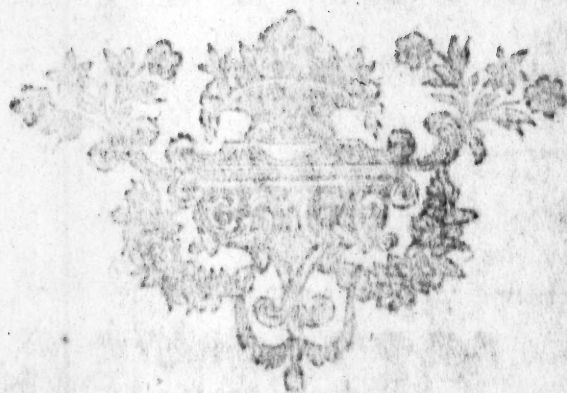
Fourthly, The greater our Sorrow for Sin is, the greater will be our Glory hereafter. *He that humbleth himself shall be exalted*, is true, not only with respect to this World, but that which is to come. When the Master of the Feast shall enter in, he shall say, *Friend, go up higher*. The Reason is evident: For *First*, By this the Sinner doth not only condemn and renounce the Pleasures of the World, but himself too. All that he relishes, is, the Favour and Mercy of God; all that he delights in, is, the Pleasure of Repentance. No Soul is more truly mortify'd to the World, or more truly inflam'd with a Thirst after God, and Heaven, and Righteousness, than the humble Penitent.

Vol. III. In the *Second Place*, nothing does more advance the Glory of God than this Humble Grief. This is that which sets a true Rate upon the Love of *Jesus*, upon the Clemency and the Mercy of God, because this is that which discerns the Provocation of our Sins; and whilst it contemplates the Vileness and Corruption of our Nature and Practices, doth easily conclude what Need we stand in of a Redeemer. 'Tis the humble Penitent that sets a just Value upon the Goodness of God in bestowing a Heaven upon us. He that looketh upon himself *less than the least of all his Mercies*, with what Astonishment, as well as Joy, must he think of God's bestowing Eternal Life and Glory upon him?

In the *last Place*, the Example and Influence of Mourning for Sin, is exceeding beneficial to Mankind. It is not easy to imagine how much the Publick may owe to the Intercession, Repentance, and Confession of pious Men. But this is not that which I especially intend. It gives Men a true Notion of Sin; for they cannot but think that very heinous and criminal, which, the more wise and good Men are, the more bitterly they bewail. It gives Men a true Notion of
the

the Beauty and Loveliness of Religion, Sermon
whilst they behold the Peace, the Con- XIII.
stancy, and the Chearfulness of those
that are most advanced in it; for nothing
is more erect, serene, firm, and unmov'd,
than that Soul which doth most sincerely
and frequently confess and bemoan its
Sins before God.





A
DISCOURSE
AGAINST
DESPAIR.

By the Reverend
Dr. RICHARD LUCAS
late Prebendary of Westminster.

Printed from a Corrected MANUSCRIPT.



Printed for John Wyat. 1717.

A
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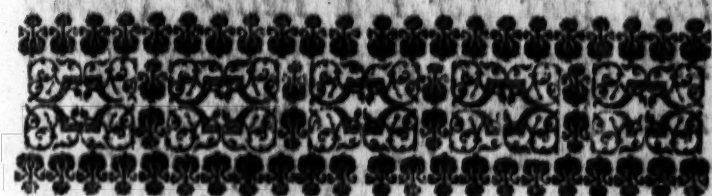
DR. RICHARD LUCAS

late Rector of Westminster

Printed from a Corrected Manuscript.



Printed for J. W. Smith



TO THE
READER.

THE following Discourse was written by my Father, at the same Time, and (as far as may be judg'd) with the same Care and Correctness as the First Volume of his Enquiry after Happiness, of which it was once design'd to make a Part. For the Method of that Enquiry leading to consider all the Objections that could be brought against the Possibility of obtaining Happiness, it seem-
ed

TO the READER.

Page. 239.
4th Edit.

ed necessary to examine what Ground there was for that Belief, (which had been too slightly taken up by many,) That some Men might lie under a Penal Incapacity, by God's final, but just Rejection of them from Grace and Pardon. But the Author afterwards thought it sufficient to observe in that Place, That if Men would act rationally, the Perswasion of such a State, even as the Objection suppos'd, might be very useful and profitable to some, and ought to have an ill Influence on none, with respect to their Eternal Interest. And Despair being one of the sorest Diseases of the Mind, the full Discussion of the Question was there referr'd to the Fourth Volume, which, it was propos'd, should treat of Indolence, and so would be the proper Place for laying open the Troubles of the Mind, and directing to their Cures. The Pro-
secution

TO the READER.

secution of which Design came in Time to be so far interrupted by the Author's other Affairs, that tho' the first rude Sketch of that Work was afterwards drawn, the Foundation laid, and some loose Materials collected for raising the Superstructure; yet nothing was ever advanced to that Perfection, which it was fit for it to appear to the World in. By this Means, it became necessary either that this Discourse should always continue conceal'd in that Obscurity to which its ill Fate had already too long confin'd it; or else venture to come abroad by it self, single, and without Support. Which last it has chosen to do, not without some Hopes of being look'd upon as a perfect Piece in its kind, or, at least, however, of being found useful (which will be sufficient for its Justification) in preserving some good,

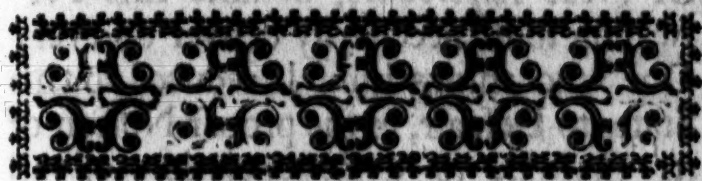
To the READER.

good, though it may be weak Christians, from those cloudy and melancholy Apprehensions they might otherwise have been exposed to.

Richard Lucas.



A DISCOURSE



A
DISCOURSE
AGAINST
DESPAIR.



Whether God has, by a Vol. III.
final and irreversibile Sentence, cut off any Sinners in this Life from all Possibility of Grace and Pardon, is a Point, the exact Discussion of which must be acknowledg'd a Work of great Difficulty, and yet of as great Importance. Of great Difficulty, because it unavoidably engages whoever undertakes it, in the Explication of some of

Vol. III. the most obscure *Texts* of *Scripture* :

Of great Importance, because this Persuasion must necessarily deliver up every One who thinks himself reduced to this State, to Despair, in the proper Notion of it, that is, to a Renunciation of all Goodness, as well as all Hopes of Mercy ; or at least it will oppress and overwhelm the Mind with insupportable Sadness and Perplexity, and so make it miserable in this Life, tho' not in another. The *Difficulty*, I confess, did not a little deter me, as despairing of attaining that Brevity and Perspicuity in this Point, which is necessary to render any Discourse either useful or acceptable. But the *Necessity* and *Importance* of the Subject did finally prevail with me to resolve to treat it, if not as well as I shou'd, yet however as well as I cou'd.

'Tis always necessary, that *that* Mind which will find out the Truth, shou'd be entirely freed from all Prepossessions and Prejudices. The *first* Thing, therefore, to be done, is, to remove a Prejudice, which, I acknowledge, I lay under, and therefore believe Others may : For I cannot but own, That I am almost unwilling to believe there shou'd be such a State

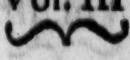
a State as this on this side Hell, and Vol. III. that for this Reason especially, because it seems, at first sight, to cast some hard Reflection upon the Infinite Goodness and Mercy of GOD. For to what Purpose is Life prolong'd to him, who cannot possibly reap any Advantage from it, who cannot possibly make any other use of it, than to encrease the Torments of his Eternity? But I soon consider'd, that this State is suppos'd to be Penal; and consequently, being the Effect of Wilful Sin, and that doubtless of the blackest Guilt and highest Aggravation, this could not justly bring any Imputation upon the Goodness of God. Having remov'd this Scruple, I'll proceed.

Whether there be such a State, or no, Reason can, I think, hardly inform us, without the Assistance of Revelation. For if we consider the Divine Nature, Reason will be apt to tell us, That his Mercy and Compassion is Infinite, and consequently, that no Sin is incapable of Pardon, if repented of.

Zosimus indeed tells us of *Constantine the Great*, that when he wou'd have been admitted to an Expiation of his Crimes, particularly the Murder of a

Vol. III. a Wife and Son, the Heathen Priests gave him this Answer, Οὐ θύοιτο οἱ Ζωσ. 1. 2. καθαροὺς τρέποντες θυσιαστήρια τελεῖσθαι κα-
 θήκει δυνάμει, *Their Religion knew no Expiation for such Crimes.* But 'twas the *Historian's* Spight to Christianity that made him belye his Pagan Profession, which was not so severe but that it allow'd Lustrations for the foulest Crimes; tho' the Sense of Nature, in this Point, be not to be taken from the Practice of the Superstitious, but the Judgment of unprejudiced Reason.

If, again, we look upon God as the Governor of the World, Reason will be apt to tell us, That it suits better with the Ends of Government, and the Clemency of a good Prince, that revolted Subjects shou'd Repent and return to their Duty, than be render'd Desperate, by being utterly excluded from all Capacity of Pardon. And yet, on the other hand, Reason will tell us, That God is Just as well as Merciful, that Acts of Justice are as necessary to uphold a Government, as Acts of Mercy. And thus, I doubt, Reason left to itself and arguing from the Nature of God, wou'd hardly be able to give us any certain Decision or satisfactory Determination of this Point; and while the
 Mind

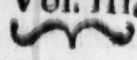
Mind of Man were in Suspense and Vol. III
Fluctuation, it could only direct us 
what were safest to be done, but cou'd
not assure us of the Success of what we
did.

There is one Way more, by which
our Reason might attempt to determine
this Question, which is, by considering
whether such an Exclusion from Pardon
or Assistance do naturally follow the wil-
ful Commission, or frequent Repetition
of any Sin, whatever this may be sup-
pos'd to be. And here, I must confess,
Wilful and Crying Sins do naturally
tend to alienate us from God, and, if long
persisted in, to efface and obliterate all
Distinctions of Good and Evil; and, by
a clear Consequence, they tend to ren-
der Men incapable of Pardon, by ren-
dering 'em incapable of Repentance.
But then, the one Incapacity can be no
greater than the other; nor will Rea-
son dictate to us, that the Capacity
of Repentance remains where that of
Pardon doth not; for this were to no
Purpose. And because the Matter of
Fact shews us, that many have become
Excellent and Virtuous Men after a
long and continued Course of wilful
Impiety, it will not be possible for us
to determine this Way, by the mere

Vol. III. Light of Reason, whether there be such a Penal State, as we have discours'd of, or no. Thus far only Reason may advance, While God continues to any Man the Means and Opportunities of Repentance, whilst he makes use of any Methods of his Providence to reclaim him; it seems far more natural to conclude, That such a One is in a Capacity of Repentance and Pardon, than otherwise: And whenever we do see the Methods of God becoming thus far successful, that the Sinner is effectually changed; Reason will conclude, That he who is sanctified, is justified; that a Change of our Nature, doth necessarily produce a Change in our State; for he that was the Enemy of God, whilst a Sinner, becomes his Favourite, by becoming a Saint.

Since then, Reason is, of its self, unable to determine this Point, it remains that Revelation only can assure us whether there be such a State, or no. And here, in a Matter of this Importance, 'tis plain, that no particular Impulse, no private Impression upon our Minds, ought to be admitted by us for Revelation; nay, shou'd *an Angel from Heaven* tell us that this were our very State,

State, he were not to be credited, if the Vol. III.
 Assertion of such a State were contra-
 dictory to the Gospel. If we come
 therefore to examine what the Scrip-
 ture asserts in this Point, I think it can-
 not but be acknowledged, That the Pro-
 clamations of Pardon on Condition of
 Repentance, runs in Terms the most
 comprehensive, general, and unlimited
 that can be imagin'd. The Nature of
 God is thus proclaim'd even upon the
 Mount, *The Lord, the Lord God, mer-* Exod. 34.
6, 7.
ciful and gracious, long-suffering, and
abundant in Goodness and Truth, keeping
Mercy for Thousands, forgiving Iniquity,
Transgression, and Sin. And in *Levi-*
ticus, chap. xxvi. after a Denunciation of
 many and sore Plagues upon the Tran-
 sgressors of the Divine Law, God con-
 cludes with Promises of Mercy to the
 Penitent, v. 40. *If they shall confess their* Levit. 26.
40, 41, 42.
Iniquity, and the Iniquity of their Fathers,
with their Trespas which they trespass'd
against me, &c. Then will I remember my
Covenant, &c. This was the Dispensa-
 tion the Jews were always under, tho'
 the Law, propos'd as a Rule of Life,
 did require Perfection; and as a Cove-
 nant of Works, did oblige to Unsinning
 Obedience, and by both did teach them
 the exceeding Sinfulness of Sin, the Rom. 7.
13.

Vol. III.  miserable State of Man, the Necessity of Mercy, and so led them on to, and prepar'd them for *Christ*. In the *Prophets*, the Doctrine of Repentance was much more frequent, and (if it could be) more plain, every thing growing more Lightsom as it grew nearer to the Day, the bright Day of the Gospel: *Let the Wicked forsake his Way, and the Unrighteous Man his Thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have Mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly Pardon. At what Instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that Nution, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil, I will repent of the Evil that I thought to do unto them. I will add but one Place more, that of Ezekiel, chap. 18. ver. 21, &c. If the Wicked will turn from all his Sins that he hath committed, and keep all my Statutes, and do that which is Lawful and Right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his Transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him; in his Righteousness that he hath done, he shall live. Have I any Pleasure at all that the Wicked should die? saith the Lord God:*

Isa. 55. 7.

Jer. 18.
7, 8.

God: and not that he should return from *Vol. III.*
his Ways, and live?

I need not urge any Proofs out of the *New Testament*, since the whole Import of the Apostolical Commission was no more than this, That they shou'd preach Repentance and Remission of Sins, thro' the Name of *Jesus*; and accordingly the Substance of all that *St. Paul* taught, was, *Repentance toward God, and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ*. This is a plain and full Declaration of the Nature and the Will of God: And therefore, the Terms of it being general and unrestrain'd, no Persons, no Sins being excluded from the Benefit of Repentance; it were Sacrilege towards God, and Uncharitableness towards Man, to bereave God of the Glory, or Man of the Comfort and Advantage of this unspeakable Mercy, by confining, curtailing, and restraining it.

'Tis true, nevertheless, that God himself may limit his Mercy by any particular Reservations, and may declare such or such a sort of Sins incapable of enjoying the Benefit of those general Tenders of Pardon which he makes to the Penitent. I will therefore now consider the several *Texts* of Scripture, which seem to imply, that he has done so:
Such

Acts 10.

Acts 20.
21.

Vol. III. Such are these : Strive to enter in at the
 strait Gate ; for many, I say unto you,
 will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.
 Repent therefore of this thy Wickedness,
 and pray God, if perhaps the Thought
 of thine Heart may be forgiven thee.
 Looking diligently, lest any Man fail of
 the Grace of God ; lest any Root of Bit-
 terness springing up, trouble you, and
 thereby many be defiled : Lest there be
 any Fornicator or profane Person, as
 Esau, who for one Morsel of Meat sold his
 Birth-right : for ye know how that after-
 ward, when he would have inherited the
 Blessing, he was rejected ; for he found
 no Place of Repentance, tho' he sought
 it carefully with Tears. For it is im-
 possible for those who were once enlighten'd,
 and have tasted of the Heavenly Gift,
 and were made Partakers of the Holy
 Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of
 God, and the Powers of the World to
 come ; if they shall fall away, to renew
 them again unto Repentance ; seeing they
 crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh,
 and put him to an open Shame. For if we
 sin wilfully, after that we have received
 the Knowledge of the Truth, there re-
 maineth no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a
 certain fearful looking for of Judgment,
 and fiery Indignation, which shall devour
 the

Luke 13.

24.

Acts 8.

22.

Heb. 12.

15, 16, 17.

Heb. 6.

4, 5, 5.

Heb. 10.

26, 27,

28, 29.

the Adversaries. He that despised Moses Vol. III.
 Law, died without Mercy, under two or 
 three Witnesses: Of how much sorer
 Punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought
 worthy, who hath troden under Foot the
 Son of God, and hath counted the Blood
 of the Covenant wherewith he was san-
 ctified, an unholy Thing, and hath done
 despite unto the Spirit of Grace? For 2 Pet. 2.
20, 21.
 if after they have escap'd the Pollutions
 of the World, through the Knowledge of
 the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they
 are again intangled therein, and over-
 come; the latter end is worse with them
 than the beginning. For it had been bet-
 ter for them not to have known the way of
 Righteousness, than after they have known
 it, to turn from the holy Commandment
 delivered unto them. There is a Sin unto 1 John 3.
16.
 Death: I do not say that he shall pray
 for it. Verily I say unto you, All Sins Mark 3.
28, 29, 30.
 shall be forgiven unto the Sons of Men,
 and Blasphemies, wherewith soever they
 shall blaspheme: But he that shall blas-
 pheme against the Holy Ghost, hath never
 Forgiveness, but is in danger of Eternal
 Damnation: Because they said he hath
 an Unclean Spirit.

I will now give as brief and plain an
 Account of the Design of these Texts as
 I can.

Vol. III. I can. Some of them are very easy and plain; such is that of *Luke xiii.* where, if *seeking to enter*, were to be understood of any Endeavours after Salvation in this Life, it must not be understood of sincere ones; for then the *second* part of the *Verse* wou'd contradict the *former*: It wou'd be so far from being a Motive to, that it wou'd be the greatest Discouragement imaginable from *Striving*, that sincere Endeavours cou'd not prevail, nor be successful. To interpret it therefore of slight, superficial or hypocritical Attempts, is agreeable enough to the Analogy of Faith, but no way agreeable to the Propriety of common Speech. For how can Sluggishness, or Hypocrisy in Religion, be called *seeking*; or their Exclusion from Heaven, be express'd by their not being *able to enter*; when 'tis owing to their Sloth and Choice, not Inability? The plain Sense therefore appears from what follows the *Verse*: The Time when these Men *seek to enter in*, is, *when the Master of the House is risen up, and hath shut to the Door*, v. 25. i. e. when the Day of Life and of Grace was expir'd. The Ground of their Confidence and Presumption, which made them knock and expect Admission, was, that they *had eaten*

eaten and drunk in Christ's Presence, and Vol. III.
that he had taught in their Streets ; --- *Ver. 26.*
they had been visible Members of Christ's
Church, and had professed his Truths :
The Reason why they were not admit-
ed was, because they were Workers of --- *Ver. 27.*
Iniquity, and Christ knew them not ;
their Life was not consonant to their
Profession ; they wore not the Cha-
acters of a Christian, the Livery of
Christ, that is, Suffering, Mortification,
or Purity and Charity : The Place
whence they were excluded was the
Kingdom of God, wherein were Abraham, --- *Ver. 28*
and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the
Prophets.

The Place of *St. Peter* is so plain, ^{2 Pct. 2.}
 that I shou'd not have set it down here,
 but that it seems to me to give Light
 to the Places of *St. Paul* ; the Sense of
 it being most evidently this, That the
 Case of an Apostate Christian is much
 more deplorable than that of an Un-
 converted *Jew* or *Pagan*.

The other *Texts* have great Difficulty
 in them ; for either they seem to sup-
 pose some Sins so hainous and provoking
 in their own nature, that they are inca-
 pable of Pardon ; or else, to suppose
 others

Vol. III. others of such a nature, that he who falls into them, becomes utterly unable to Repent; or else they seem to make the Issue and Success of Repentance it self very doubtful and uncertain: Either of which Things, if true, wou'd very much lessen the Grace and Favour of the Gospel, and undermine the Foundation of a Christian's Comfort, and dishearten Men from endeavouring after Virtue and Salvation. These *Texts* therefore deserve to be carefully weighed, and, if it may be, fully and satisfactorily clear'd. In order to which, I will premise some few Things, which, if they appear extremely plain, will be able to do us this Service, That they will fortifie and confirm us against those Scruples which these, or the like difficult *Texts* of Scripture, may raise in our Minds.

First, I think 'tis plain, that no Sins were so great, but that Baptism and Repentance did cleanse and free Men from the Guilt of them. This the whole *Catholick Church* has ever with one Consent, in all Times and in all Places, unanimously taught; the Discipline of the Church being not more severe to Christians falling after Baptism, than gentle

gentle and easie to Converts and Prose-
lytes : Nor was the Gate of the Church
ever shut against Idolater, Persecutor or
Blasphemer, Murderer or Adulterer, who
declar'd his Repentance, and' confess'd
himself ready to become a Christian.

The Motive by which *Zosimus* tells
us an *Egyptian* induced *Constantine* to
embrace the Christian Religion, *Idons Zosimus,*
ἀποστολὴ τοῦ ἀναγινώσκοντος τὴν ἱερὰν lib. 2.
ἀποστολὴν, That it did assure its Converts of
the Remission of all Sins whatever, was
an unquestionable and Catholick Truth,
whatever become of the Story it self. It
were easie for me to demonstrate this by
numerous Instances out of *Ecclesiastical*
Records ; but none can be so satisfactory
as those we meet with in *Holy Writ*,
because tho' the *Primitive Fathers* might
err in their Discipline, the *Apostles*
cou'd not, or at least not in this Point
of so great Importance.

Of these therefore I will pitch upon
two ; the *first*, those Three thousand con-
verted by St. Peter's Sermon, *Acts 2.* What *Acts 2.*
kind of Men these were, is evident from
ver: 23. they were loaded with the Guilt
of our Saviour's Blood, for him they
had taken, and by wicked hands cruci-
fied and slain. St. Ambrose is of Opi-
nion, that some of those who blasphemed
the

Vol. III. *the Spirit of God, Mat. xii.* were of the Number of these Converts. But this, 'tis true, were as easily denied as affirm'd; for, I think, neither can be prov'd. But whether any of them were guilty of that particular Blasphemy, which gave occasion to our *Saviour's* Discourse, or not, matters not much; because, I think, there's scarce room to question, but that many (if not all of them) were guilty of the same; which *St. Peter* seems to me most plainly to insinuate, *ver. 22.* when he tells them, *that, Jesus of Nazareth was a Man approv'd of God among them, by Miracles, and Wonders, and Signs which God did by him in the midst of them, as they themselves also knew.* Wherefore this? But to reproach them with their Obstinacy, in resisting the mighty Evidence of the *Divine Spirit*, and to call to their Remembrance the Guilt of their malicious Blasphemies. For whether these were Personally present at the Crucifixion of our Lord, or only involv'd in the Community of the Guilt, as the whole Nation was, is a Question of no great Moment; since 'tis certain, they were well acquainted with the great and numerous Miracles *Jesus of Nazareth* had wrought. The Truth or

or Certainty of his Miracles was not Vol. III.
as much as called in question by them; therefore all the Dispute that could arise amongst the *Jews* about this Matter, must necessarily concern the Power by which he wrought them. Now this cou'd be but either God, or the Devil; and consequently, they who ascrib'd them not to God, must, as they in *Mat. xii.* did, ascribe them to the Devil. Now that they who *with wicked hands crucified him*, did not acknowledge his Miracles to proceed from a Divine Power, is self-evident: For if they had confess'd, that *Jesus with the finger of God did cast out Devils*, they must have confess'd, what was the natural and necessary Consequence of it, that *the Kingdom of God was come upon them*. It remains therefore, that they entertained the same Notion of the Power by which *Jesus* wrought his Miracles that the *Scribes* and *Pharisees* did; that they, with them, imputed 'em to an Unclean Spirit, and were guilty of the self-same Blasphemy against the *Holy Ghost*. To put this Matter beyond all Question; Let any One consider the Behaviour of the *Jews* towards *Christ*, in the Time of his Crucifixion, *Mat. xxvii. 39, &c.* They revil'd and reproach'd him as

Vol. III. an Impostor, and upbraided him with his
 very Miracles as so many Cheats, wrought
 not by GOD, but by the Devil. What
 else can be the meaning of those words,
 Mar. 27. *He sav'd others, himself he cannot save :*
 42, — *He said, I am the Son of God ?* What
 43. doth all this amount to, but plainly
 this ? The whole People of the Jews,
 and the whole World, may now see this
 Man's Imposture : Had he been the
 Son of GOD, he wou'd now have de-
 liver'd him ; it is easy now to con-
 clude, by GOD's abandoning of him,
 to what Power we are to impute his
 Miracles. This, sure, must needs have
 been their general Sense, and this
 shews us what they were guilty of ;
 Luke 23. and yet Christ prays for them, *Father,*
forgive them, for they know not what
they do : And here, in *Acts ii.* we meet
 with the Effect and Return of his
 Prayer, in the Conversion of Three
 Thousand.

The Second Instance, That none were
 excluded from Repentance and Remis-
 sion of Sins, by Baptism, is the Con-
 version of St. Paul. What his Cha-
 racter was before he became an Israe-
 lite of Christianity, is manifest from
 several Places of the *New Testament.*
 We

We may take it briefly from his own Vol. III. Pen, thus, *He was a Blasphemer, and a Persecutor, and Injurious.* I need not stand to aggravate the Words, and exaggerate his Guilt; they are plain enough. Was St. Paul ignorant of the Miracles which *Jesus of Nazareth* and his *Disciples* wrought? What then? Did he impute them to a Divine Power? Why then did he persecute the Church of Christ? Why did he Blaspheme? Why did he treat the Members of Christ with such contumelious Violence? But if he did not impute the Miracles of *Christ* to the *Holy Spirit*, I leave any One to guess to what Spirit he must impute 'em. And if his Blasphemy consisted in this, I must confess, I am not acute enough to be able to distinguish the Blasphemy of *Saul*, from that of the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*; the only Difference that I can find, shall be observ'd presently. To be short, if we say that he did acknowledge the Miracles of *Christ* to have a Divine Original, and yet persecuted the Church; it cannot be denied but that he did more maliciously oppose God and the Truth, and so became more incapable of Repentance, than they who did not believe the Miracles to spring from a Divine Power.

Vol. III. If we say, that he did not acknowledge the Miracles to proceed from the *Holy Spirit*, but from an Unclean one, 'tis most manifest that he was guilty of the Blasphemy against the *Holy-Ghost*, and yet did obtain Mercy, nay Mercy after an extraordinary Manner, and with it an Apostolical Dignity. But you will say, He says himself, he did all this ignorantly. 'Tis true, and in *Unbelief* too; and so did the *Jews*, not only the Common People, but the Rulers too: *And now, Brethren, I wot that through Ignorance ye did it, as did also your Rulers. For had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.*

Acts 3.

1 Cor. 2.8.

St. Paul then, in all probability, blasphemed the *Holy-Ghost* as other *Jews* did; for it is hard to be imagin'd that he shou'd call into question the Reality and Certainty of our *Saviour's* or his *Disciples* Miracles. He did it out of Ignorance and Unbelief, as did the rest of the *Jews*. But, I confess, I believe his Blindness and Infidelity was not altogether so criminal as that of other *Jews*; his proceeding, probably, from his Zeal for the *Law*; theirs, from carnal and base Interests. As to all other kinds of Immoralities besides this of Blasphemy, which I have spoken of,

'tis

is superfluous to prove, that none were Vol. III.
of such a guilty Nature, as to render
either *Jew* or *Pagan* incapable of Ad-
mission into the Church of *Christ*, or of
Remission of Sins, through Repentance
and Baptism. I will therefore proceed,

Secondly, As no Sin did render the
Unconverted incapable of Baptism, so
no Sin after Baptism did render the
Lapsed Christian incapable of Pardon,
upon Repentance. We can't suppose,
with any colour of Reason, that *Chri-*
stians are under a severer Dispensation
than the *Jews* were; or, that those
indefinite and universal Promises of
Mercy to the Penitent, in the *Law* and
the *Prophets*, shou'd be reduc'd within
narrower Bounds in the *Gospel*: And
yet we find the *Jews* frequently viola-
ting the Holy Covenant, and that not
only by some particular Transgression
of a particular Precept, but by down-
right Apostacy and Desertion of the
GOD of *Israel*, and yet receiv'd again
into Grace and Favour by GOD, upon
Repentance: And tho' they repeated
their Provocations very often, yet did
GOD repeat his Deliverances as often,
provided they repeated their Repentance
too. What shou'd I insist upon the

Vol. III. Cruelties, Impieties and Idolatry, the Captivity, Repentance, and Restitution of *Manasseh*? What shou'd I mention the Ambition, Bloodshed and Adultery of *David*? The Loosness and Idolatry of *Solomon*? Innumerable almost are the Instances of the *Old Testament*, wherein God appears to magnifie his Mercy and Compassion, in the Pardon of the Crimes, Backslidings and Apostacies of such as were covenanted with him, and dear to him.

If we come to the *New*, we shall find the same Mercy triumphing over the Falls and Ingratitude of *Christians*. Did the Denial of *Peter*, or the Incest of the *Corinthian*, exclude either from Pardon and Salvation? Was not Ex-communication it self design'd for the retrieving of the Soul, by Chastisements inflicted on the Body? And yet none but Christians, and none but Criminals in the highest nature, did in those Times fall under this Ecclesiastical Censure. To what Purpose doth the *Spirit* call the *Asiatic Churches* to Repentance? To what Purpose doth God respite the Ruin of Men, and give them Time to Repent? To what Purpose doth he Chastise his Back-sliding Children? And how can his Chastisements be an Argument

ment of his Affection and Compassion, Vol. III
 if a miserable Christian once fallen after Baptism were incapable of Repentance, or (which is all one) if his Repentance were incapable of Pardon? Nor doth the Scripture seem, in the least, to be wrested or forced by any private Interpretation, when 'tis urg'd for the Confirmation of this Doctrine. Which appears plainly from hence, That this was the Universal Opinion of the Catholick Church.

The *Novatians* themselves (whatever Severity they may be tax'd of towards the Lapsed) did not dispute the Success of their Repentance with God, but the Authority of the Church in dispensing Absolution to such, and restoring them to Ecclesiastical Peace and Communion. For thus *Socrates* represents the State of this Controversy, —

ἡ πανταχὺ ἐκκλησία ἐγγραφὴ (Ναυδτῶ) μὴ *Socrates*,
 δέχεσθαι τὸς ἐπιεικότερας εἰς τὰ μυστήρια. l. 4. c. 28.
 ἀλλὰ περιέριπεν μὲν αὐτοὺς εἰς μελάνοιαν. ἡ
 ὃ συγχώρησιν ἐπέβηκεν Θεῷ, τῷ δυνάμει καὶ
 ἔξουσίαν ἔχοντι συγχωρεῖν ἁμαρτήματα.

'Tis true, the *Council of Eliberis* treats Apostatiz'd Christians with great Sharpness and Severity; and as true, that the earliest Times did exercise great Rigour upon three sorts of Sins, *Apostacy*, *Mur-*

Vol. III. *der*, and *Adultery*, not admitting these (as some think) to Absolution and the Eucharist after the severest Repentance no, not in the certain Approaches of Death. But then, whether this were the Universal Practice of the two first Ages, for longer it is not pretended to continue, or only prevailed in some Places, and upon some Emergences, I am not satisfied. In the next place, (which is more considerable) This is plain, this Practice was not grounded upon any Opinion of the Impossibility of the Pardon and Salvation of such, but merely upon Motives of Prudence obliging them to adapt their Discipline to the State and Face of Things at that Time. Hence it was, that *that* Rigour and Severity was presently relax'd, and that too by Men of eminent Zeal and Sanctity, and prudent Assertors of Ecclesiastical Discipline. This is farther clear, in that several Canons of the *Ancyran*, *Nicene*, and other Councils have most expressely declared for that Opinion, which asserts Apostates, Murderers, Adulterers, &c. capable of Repentance and Pardon.

And this is that Account, which *Innocent I.* gives of the Severity of that Discipline, which refus'd Those Pardon
and

and Communion, who being fall'n into these Sins, had not sought it 'till they were under the Apprehensions of Death: Vol. III.

Nam cum illis temporibus Persecutiones crebra essent, &c. "That it was whol- Epist. ad Exuper. Tolosan.

"som and necessary for those Times of
 "Persecution, lest Men might be the
 "more easily tempted to Apostacy, by the
 "Easiness of their Restitution." 'Tis
 worth the minding too, that the ancient
 Customs he refers to did admit even this
 worst sort of *Clinicks* to Repentance, tho'
 not Communion; by which at once ap-
 pear'd the ancient Zeal and Tendernefs
 of Christians for the Honour of the
 Church, in that they wou'd not pro-
 stitute its Discipline; and for the Ho-
 nour of GOD, and Welfare of Souls, in
 that they wou'd not, by any Easiness,
 be accessory to Mens Falls, or by too
 great Severity render them desperate in
 'em. At this Day, all *Churches* and all
Interpreters do unanimously agree, That
 whoever doth truly Repent shall be
 sav'd; and therefore none have ever
 yet suppos'd, that either Blasphemy a-
 gainst the Holy Ghost, or Apostacy
 from the Christian Religion, did ever
 render any utterly incapable of Pardon,
 unless they did first suppose, that these
 Sins rendred them incapable of Re-
 pentance:

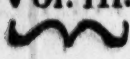
Vol. III. penitance : And indeed, nothing is more undeniably evident than, That *whoever is born of God, and led by the Spirit of God*, as every true Penitent is, must be dear to GOD, through *Jesus Christ* ; That he who has pass'd out of the Kingdom of Darkness into that of Light, is already pass'd from Death to Life, and shall not come into Condemnation ; for the Holy and the Righteous are naturally the Objects of Divine Love.

In Vita
Sancti
Martini.

Sulpicius Severus tells us of St. *Martin*, That the Devil upbraiding him for receiving into his Monastery such as had by various Crimes made Forfeiture of the Benefit of their Baptism ; and he answering, That their former Errors being purg'd by their present Piety, he was warranted by the Mercy of GOD to absolve from the Guilt those who are now freed from the Power of Sin, and the Devil replying, that there was no Pardon to be expected for such as fell after Baptism ; the Saint broke out into this Expression, *Si tu ipse, O miserabilis, ab hominum insectatione desisteres, & te factorum tuorum vel hoc tempore, cum dies judicii in proximo est, peniteret, ego tibi verè confusus in Domino, Christi misericordiam polli-*

pollicerer. “ If thou, wretched Spirit, Vol. III.
“ could’st forbear thy malicious Perfe-
“ cution of Mankind, and repent thee
“ of thy Crimes, I durst, tho’ the Day
“ of Judgment do now so near approach,
“ assure thee of the Mercy of Christ. ”

What Credit is to be afforded to this Story, I know not : I confess, I have a greater Esteem for the Charity than for the Judgment of this Sentence, for I know, that *Christ took not on him the Nature of Angels* ; and yet, I must own, I am almost inclin’d, upon another Ground, to be thus far of the *Saint’s* Opinion, that cou’d the *Devil* cease to be *Devil*, he wou’d cease to be miserable. But whatever be *his* Case, (for that concerns not us much) as to *us* it is certain, that in the very Nature of Things there is a necessary and inseparable Connexion between Holiness and Happiness ; which if we acknowledge, we may easily subscribe to this Truth, That no One, who is a true Penitent in this Life, shall be a damned Sinner in the other. The Result of all which amounts to thus much, That every Man who finds in himself the true Marks of a sincere Repentance, ought to be fill’d with chearful, comfortable Hopes ; and that no Man can conclude himself
lost

Vol. III. lost to all Eternity, 'till he finds that  the Malignity and Obstinacy of his Wickedness is such, that Repentance is a vain and an impossible Attempt; which he can never find, 'till he has tried all imaginable Means of his Recovery in vain, and persisted in this Trial to his Life's End. For, I think, I may observe,

Thirdly, That the Scripture looks upon the Time of this Life as the Day of Grace, the Day of Trial and Conflict, and gives us no Account of any final, peremptory, and irrevocable Sentence till this Time be expir'd. This Argument *Epiphanius* makes use of for the Confutation of the *Novatian* Heresy, which he suppos'd to consist in denying the Pardon of God to Sins after Baptism, giving this Account why the *Rich Man* in the Gospel did not obtain Mercy, when he sought it, Ἐσφραγισαὶ γὰρ τὰ ταμιεῖα, πεπληρωθὲς ὁ χερὼν, καὶ ὁ ἀγὼν ἐτελείωθη — καὶ τὰ πάντα σαφῶς τετελείωθη μετὰ τὴν ἐντεῦθεν ἐκδημίαν. But he proceeds, ἔτι οὐκ ὄντων ἐν τῷ ἀγῶνι πάντων, καὶ μετὰ πτωσὶν ἐν ἀνάστασις, ἔτι ἰλησις, ἔτι θυσία, ἔτι ὁμολογία. That is, *When Life is past, the Treasures of Mercy are seal'd up, the Time of Grace is expir'd,*
the

the Race is ended, &c. and immutable Vol. III.
Rewards expect the Conquerors, immutable ~~~~~
Punishments the Conquer'd. But while we are in the Race, he that falls may rise, there is place for Hope, for Repentance. I cannot but acknowledge, that God may be provok'd, by Men's Impiety, to withdraw his Grace; nay, he does so upon the Commission of every wilful Sin; for every such doth grieve and quench the Spirit: But that the Spirit once retir'd, returns no more, or that Grace lost is finally and irreparably lost; this is utterly contradictory to Scripture, as appears from what I have said before.

I acknowledge again, that there is a Time wherein God will be no more intreated; that there is a Time that God will not hear the Sinner, tho' he seek him early; that he will laugh at *Prov. 1:*
his Calamity, and will mock when his Fear cometh. Whether this do extend to the Eternal, or only to the Temporal Punishment of the Sinner, I dare not determine; but whoever consults such *Places of Scripture*, will easily determine, that when Things are come to this Extremity, and Sin is grown up to this Maturity, then the fatal Minute of a Nation's Desolation, or a particular

Vol. III. ticular Sinner's Death is arriv'd. If this be so, the utmost that can be infer'd from this, is, that when the Measure of Iniquity is filled up, and the final Sentence of Destruction, or Death, is pronounced against any Nation or single Person, Repentance comes then too late. And even here, it will be impossible for Man to distinguish before-hand between a Sentence of Chastisement and utter Excision; when the Arm is lifted up, it will be hard for the Sinner to discover whether the Ax be aim'd against the Bough, or or against the Root of the Tree; and that for this plain Reason, because every Denunciation even of final Ruin is not immutable and peremptory, but conditional; and the Decree proceeds sometimes only upon Supposal of Impenitence, which is evident from that remarkable Place of the Prophet Jeremiah, *At what Instant I shall speak concerning a Nation, and concerning a Kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: If that Nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their Evil, I will repent of the Evil that I thought to do unto them.* The Sum of all, is, If a Man will act rationally, his Hope must not expire but with himself, but with his Life; and yet he must

Chap. 18.

must remember, that *the Goodness of* Vol. III.
God is design'd to lead him to Repentance; 
 that Presumption doth but treasure up Rom. 2.
Wrath against the Day of Wrath; that,
 lastly, he knows not how soon his da-
 ring Provocations may bring his Life
 and Hope to their last Period, and
 tempt God, tho' so infinitely Merciful,
 to pass his final and irreversibile Sen-
 tence of Death and Destruction upon
 him.

This now gives me a fair and easy
 Entrance into the Explication of those
 Texts which yet remain to be spoken
 to. To begin with the Case of *Esau*, Heb. 12.
Heb. 12. Whoever will take the Pains 19. ex-
plain'd.
 to compare the Exhortation of this
 Chapter, beginning at the 15th Verse,
 with that in Chap. iii. beginning at the
 6th Verse, will see so close a Parallel
 between the Words, the Instances, and
 the Design of both, that he will be
 forced to confess, that the Intent of the
Apostle in both Places is the same.
 Now the Enforcement of the Exhorta-
 tion, Chap. iii. is plainly this, that the
Hebrews laying to Heart the fatal Issue
 of the Rebellion of their Ancestors a-
 gainst *Moses*, and consequently God,
 namely, That they were excluded from
Canaan,

Vol. III. *Canaan*, and their Carcasses fell in the Wilderness, should be, by their Example, deterr'd from Apostatizing or Revolting from *Jesus Christ*, lest they should draw upon themselves the like final Ruin and Destruction. The Exhortation is the same, the Aim of it the same in Chap. xii. only the Instance of *Esau* is substituted for that of those who fell in the Wilderness (as best suited to the Case of those whom he persuades to abstain from Intemperance and Uncleanness;) which is evident from v. 25. *See that ye refuse not him that speaketh; for if they escap'd not who refus'd him that spake on Earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from Heaven:* So that this regards, as it is applicable to us, the final Decision of our State. The Case of *Esau*, in respect of his Birth-right, after he had sold it for a Morsel of Meat, was as fatal and irrecoverable as that of the *Jews* fall'n in the Wilderness, in respect of *Canaan*. And such is the Case of every Christian, when the Patience of God is wearied out, when the *Spirit* of God will contend no longer with him, when Divine Wrath and Justice begin to act their Part, and God seals up the Sinner under

der the final, fatal Doom of Death and Vol. III.
 Ruin; and because, 'tis to us uncertain
 how soon God may be provok'd to this,
 or what that Height or Measure of Ini-
 quity is, which will bring down this
 Judgment upon us, we have reason *not* to
harden our Hearts, but to *hear his Voice*
to Day whilst it is called to Day.

Periphrasis is not only the greatest
 Ornament, but the truest Excellency
 of those Discourses which are design'd
 to inform and teach: I may therefore
 easily be acquitted from the Charge of
 Tedioufness, if, in order to the ren-
 dering the Sense of this *Text* easy and
 obvious, I sum up the Motives or En-
 forcements of the Exhortation under
 plain Heads. These are,

First, That Apostacy from the Chri-
 stian Religion, is a Guilt of a more hain-
 ous Nature than the Disobedience of the
Jews in the Wilderness; or, to express
 it in a Phrase more nearly allied to the
Text, That renouncing the Faith, the
 Hope, the Birthright of a Christian, for
 the Pleasures of Intemperance, Unclean-
 ness, &c. is a more unpardonable Sin
 than that of *Esau*, who sold his Birth-
 right for a Morsel of Meat.

Secondly, That therefore the *Hebrews*
 had great reason to fear, that their
 Cc Apostacy,

Vol. III. Apostacy, if they shou'd by these or such-like Motives be betray'd into it, wou'd provoke God to pass the final and irreversibile Decree of their Destruction and Ruin.

Thirdly, That when God shou'd seal this Decree, and their Destruction shou'd come upon them, their Repentance wou'd avail them very little; for the Carcasses fall'n in the Wilderness could never enter *Canaan*, nor *Esau* regain that Birth-right which he had renounced.

If this be rightly understood, I have already explained that other Place, *Heb. x. 26, 27, &c.* For the Words are nothing else but a Persuasive to Stedfastness and Constancy in the Faith: And the Motives contain'd in 'em are all reducible to the same Heads; namely,

Heb. 10.
26, 27, &c.
explain'd.

First, That the Vengeance of God, and fiery Indignation, wou'd certainly overtake and destroy Apostates, together with the other Adversaries of the Truth. Nor was this to be wonder'd at; since,

Secondly, It was a more Crying Sin to tread under Foot the Son of God, and to count the Blood of the Covenant, where-with they were sanctified, an unholy Thing, and to do despite unto the Spirit of Grace, than to rebel against, or to apostatize from

from the *Law of Moses*: And indeed, Vol. III.
 what other Issue of Things, than what is
 here threatned, cou'd be expected, if it
 had been consider'd.

Thirdly, That they who renounced
Christ, had no other Saviour to depend
 upon, no other Sacrifice by which their
 Sin could be expiated; which is the
 plain Sense of those Words, *ἐκ τῆς τῆς*
ἀμαρτίας ἀποδείξεως οὐκ ἔστιν ἔτι, *there remaineth*
no farther Sacrifice for Sin. This is the
 plain and full Sense of this portion of
 Scripture; it denounceth God's Judg-
 ments and Vengeance against Apostates,
 and shews the Reasonableness of it; and
 all this as an Argument to deter Men
 from Apostacy, by the Danger of it: But
 it saith not one Word of the Possibility
 or Impossibility of the Return or Repen-
 tance of an Apostate, or of his Pardon
 upon Repentance. Together with all
 this we must remember, that the *Apostle*
 did certainly foreknow that sudden and
 unavoidable Destruction which was now
 ready to overwhelm the *Jews*, the Ad-
 versaries of the Truth; and this may
 give new Light to our Thoughts, and
 shew us why *St. Paul* did not only de-
 clare what was reasonably to be expect-
 ed shou'd be, but also what actually

Vol. III. wou'd be, the sudden Issue and Event of
 Things.

Heb. 6. 4,
 &c. ex-
 plain'd.

If all hitherto said has been seriously consider'd, there will be little Difficulty in Heb. vi. For,

First, That the *Apostle* there speaks of Apostacy, is confess'd by all Commentators. And that,

Secondly, He deters the *Hebrews* from it, by representing the Danger of it, is plain from the 7th and 8th Verses; For the Earth which drinketh in the Rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth Herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth Blessing from God: But that which beareth Thorns and Briars, is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned. By which the *Apostle* seems to me plainly to intimate that final and peremptory Decree of God, concerning the speedy and utter Destruction of all those *Jews* who rejected Christ; whether such as thro' Infidelity and Unbelief never embraced him, or such as thro' Apostacy renounced him; the Case of these Apostates being altogether as bad as that of the Infidel or Unbelieving Jew, Seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put

Heb. 6. 6.

put him to an open Shame. Having well weigh'd this I once thought, that I might positively assert,

Thirdly, That that Impossibility of restoring Apostates to that State of Pardon and Salvation, which they obtained by Baptism, and forfeited by Apostacy, did not imply a moral Impossibility of Repentance, consisting in the Difficulty of putting off an accurs'd Habit, of returning from Apostacy to Christianity; but the unavoidableness of that Destruction which God had decreed against the *Jews*, who rejected Christ either by Infidelity or Apostacy, as those who rejected the richest Mercy, the last and most astonishing Means of their Salvation; *St. Paul* knowing very well that this Decree of God was fatal, and the Execution of it would be speedy, like that upon the rebellious *Israelites* in the Wilderness, when God swore in his Wrath that they should not enter into his Rest. And if so, then the Case of the *Jewish* Christians becoming Apostates, would have something peculiar in it; and we could make no other general Use of it, than to deter Men from Apostacy, as that which their Example taught us to be a State of the utmost Danger; but we cou'd not pronounce it

Vol. III. incapable of Recovery, unless a sudden Execution of Divine Vengeance should render it so. But this Interpretation being new, or at least new to me, I only propose it as probable, for any thing I yet discern to the contrary, and leave it to Time and the Sagacity of better Judgments to discover how far it may be relied upon. The common Solution, which takes the word *Impossible*, to signify moral Impossibility, that is, great Difficulty, is certainly agreeable to the Usage of Scripture in several Places, and seems to be the utmost that the Church of Christ did ever suppose imply'd in this and the like Texts; as is evident from what I have said before.

The Sin against the Holy Ghost, explain'd.

I will now advance on to give a brief Account of the Sin against the *Holy Ghost*. What it is, is so evident, that I think no sober Writer ever made a Shift to mistake it. For that Variety of Opinions, which seems to be amongst Men concerning it, doth not arise from hence, that they doubted what that Sin was which our Saviour pronounced unpardonable in the *Scribes* and *Pharisees*, but what Sin 'tis amongst Christians, which doth most nearly approach to that: The Thing otherwise, and

and abstracted from this Consideration, Vol. III. is plain beyond Dispute; the Sin was Blasphemy, and the Blasphemy was this, *They said he hath an unclean Spirit*; or, which is equivalent, *he casteth out Devils by the Prince of the Devils.* Mark 3. In all this there is no Difficulty; the Difficulty is only this, in what Sense our *Saviour* pronounced this Sin unpardonable. That this is not to be taken so indefinitely and universally, as to admit no Restriction or Limitation of any conditional Supposition or Exception, or any other Interpretation that may mitigate the Rigor and Severity of the Sentence, several Reasons forced me to believe; as,

First, Because, as I have prov'd before, there are undeniable Instances proving this Matter of Fact, that this Blasphemy has been actually pardon'd; and therefore, is not utterly unpardonable. Indeed I am not able to see, that the *Jews* in general cou'd have any other Notion of *Christ*, when they rejected him, than that of an Impostor; or that they who rejected and crucified him as an Impostor, could have any other Notion of his Miracles, than that Blasphemous one which our *Saviour* seems to pronounce unpardonable; and yet, I think,

Vol. III. 'tis so plain, that all who were guilty of his Death, did not perish in that Guilt, that it need not be prov'd.

Secondly, Apostacy is, in the Sense of St. Peter, a more Crying Sin than Infidelity (so I call the Rejection of *Christ* by Jews and Pagans, tho' I am not ignorant Apostacy may be sometimes called so;) and yet Peter denied *Christ*, and was pardon'd: And the Church of *Christ*, tho' for a little Time it refus'd to restore Apostates, upon Penitence, to a plenary Possession of the Benefits of that Communion they had renounced; yet did they never think such incapable of God's Pardon, but unanimously, when Occasion requir'd, declar'd the contrary, and practis'd pursuant to this Declaration in the Restitution of Apostates: And yet our Saviour had said plainly, *Whosoever shall deny me before Men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven.* And St. Peter makes the Case of the revolted Christian more desperate than that of the unconverted Jew or Pagan.

Matt. 10.

Thirdly, Were this Sin utterly incapable of Pardon, so many are the Approaches to it, so many are the Sins amongst the Christians which extreamly resemble it, or are equal to it, that the
Minds

Minds of most Men wou'd be fill'd with Vol. III
incessant Scruples and tormenting Jealousies, and more wou'd be desperately
harden'd in Sins. This is manifest,
from those several kinds of Sins against
the *Holy Ghost*, we meet with in the
School-men, and from these kind of
Effects frequently visible amongst Christians. Who can say, that the Holiness
and Purity of the Christian Doctrine,
join'd with the Miracles of our *Saviour*
and the *Apostles* who deliver'd it, is not
as evident a Proof of its proceeding from
God, as the Miracles of *Jesus*, join'd
with the Purity of his Doctrine, were,
of his being the *Christ*, the *Messias*?
Why will not then the Contempt and
Scoffs cast upon this Doctrine be as
unpardonable Blasphemy against the
Holy Ghost, as the Rejecting and Re-
vilings his Miracles? Is not an obsti-
nate Resisting the *Spirit* of God,
when we believe his Precepts, and ac-
knowledge that we do so, a Sin that
looks, at least, almost as dreadful as
Resisting Him, when Men do not be-
lieve they do so, how sufficient soever
the Evidence offer'd for their Conviction
were? Doth not the grieving and
quenching of the *Spirit*, when we
have receiv'd him, carry in it, almost
at

Vol. III. at least, as much Ingratitude and Willfulness as the refusing to admit or entertain him? Doth not the Relapse of a Christian into Immorality, and his Continuance in it, being betray'd only by his own Carelessness, and the Blandishments and Opportunities of Sensual Pleasures, seem at least to involve him in as hainous a Guilt, as Apostacy ever cou'd that Man whom the Dread or Sense of Tortures, or a croud of other Evils, compell'd to it? 'Tis needless to multiply Instances of this kind; this is sufficient to make us apprehend the Effects which wou'd attend the Doctrine of the Unpardonableness of the Sin against the *Holy Ghost*, if it admitted of no Restriction, no Mitigation.

Lastly, There is no necessity of understanding the Words of our Saviour so Generally and Universally, without any Condition, Exception, or Limitation. What is more common, than for general and indefinite Propositions in *Scripture*, to include a tacit Exception or Condition suppos'd? For Instance,

1 Cor. 6. *Neither Fornicators, nor Idolaters, nor Adulterers, &c. shall inherit the Kingdom of God.*

Luke 12. *He that denieth me before Men,*

*Mens, shall be denied before the Angels Vol. III.
of God.*

Who sees not that these general Propositions must suppose (a) Impenitence? What Ground then is there, that can oblige us to think that this Proposition, *But unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven,* ---Ver. 10. should not include the same Supposition, I mean, that of Impenitence? When all Denunciations of Death or Judgment against Sin, when all Doctrinal Propositions which publish its Punishment, do declare only the Nature and Merit of Sin, not the unavoidable Event; or if they be understood to speak of the necessary Event of Sin, they must be understood of Sin unrepented of, and standing before the Tribunal of God, which is much the same: How come these Words of our Saviour to admit of no such Condition, no such Supposition? Why may they not be understood thus? This Blasphemy shall not be forgiven, when God enters into Judgment with the Blasphemer; where-

(a) Οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ Χεῖρος τῆς βλασφημίας, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο, καὶ ἀρεθὴς. ἀλλὰ τῆς βλασφημίας, ἅτ' ἐν τῷ τοῦ τῆς βλασφημίας ἐπιμύσει. ἡ καὶ ἡτ' ἐκ τῆς ἀμαρτίας ἀποδοκίμασθαι τῆς Θεοῦ. Athanas. vol. 1. p. 237. edit. Col. 1686.

Vol. III, ever he finds this Guilt remaining, he will most certainly punish it? But that this Guilt cannot be wiped off, that the Blasphemer is incapable of Repentance; whence is this concluded against this Sin from this general Proposition, rather than against any other Sin from as general Propositions? The Answer is, Because otherwise there wou'd be no Distinction between this Sin against the *Holy Ghost* and other Sins.

There wou'd be, indeed, no Distinction between this and other Wilful Sins, unless in the Degree, not Certainty, of the Punishment of either. But there wou'd be a wide Distinction between this Blasphemy, and Sins of Ignorance or Infirmary; for the one wou'd be Involuntary, the other Wilful. And this is indeed the true Distinction which our Saviour makes between those Blasphemies which the *Jews* spoke against the *Son of Man*, and those they spoke against the *Holy Ghost*. The one were Wilful, the other were not; and therefore, the one were Pardonable, and the other were not. And this is plainly the Reason our Saviour himself assigns of the Pardonableness of the one, and the Unpardonableness

bleness of the other. *If I had not done* Vol. III.
among them the Works which none other
Man did, they had not had Sin. The *John 15.*

The Meaning of which Words must sure be this, There was not in the Birth, Parentage, and Person of *Jesus of Nazareth* such a Degree of Evidence of his being the *Messias*, as wou'd have render'd the *Jews* Rejection of him inexcusable: But the Evidence of his Divine Works, wrought by the Spirit of God, was such that nothing but Obstinacy, and Perverseness, and Blindness arising from sinful Lusts and Prejudices, could have resisted; and therefore, this Sin (their Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost) must not be placed in the same Rank or Class with their Sins of Ignorance, their Blasphemies against the *Son of Man*. And thus, I confess, I can see no Necessity that can oblige me to distinguish this Sin from other Wilful Sins, any otherwise than as one Wilful Sin may be distinguish'd from another, that is, by the Degrees of Wilfulness.

I know no Objection of the least Moment against this Interpretation, but only this, That the word *All Sins and Blasphemies*, in *Matthew* and *Mark*, do seem to make it necessary to distinguish the Sin against the *Holy Ghost*, not only from

Mat. 12.
Mark 3.

Vol. III. from all Sins of Ignorance or Infirmity, but all Sins whatever. But who that reads the following *Verses*, or the same Discourse in *Luke xii.* will not easily see that those general Expressions are limited by the Subject they belong to, and confin'd to those Blasphemies and Indignities which either *Jews* or *Gentiles* might be guilty of towards the *Son of Man*, consider'd without regard to his Works and Miracles.

This Exposition of our *Saviour's* Words being plain, obvious, useful, and agreeable to the Analogy of Faith, I shall not think it necessary to spend Time in the Confutation of that Opinion which determines this Sin unpardonable; only I'll take notice briefly of the Insufficiency of that one general Reason by which they endeavour to confirm it, namely, That he who commits this Sin is incapable of Repentance. Why so? Because he resists the plainest Evidence that God can make use of for his Conviction. But what then? If a Man doth so to Day, must he ever do so? How then came the *Jews* who had crucified our *Saviour* to be afterwards converted? There may be many Prejudices and Indispositions upon a Man's Mind to Day, that may hinder the Operation
and

and design'd Effect of Miracles, and Vol. III.
those may be gradually remov'd. Or
why may not the Miracle of our Sa-
viour's Resurrection, or *saving of himself*,
prevail, where his Miracles wrought
for the *saving of others* did not? But
you will say, God, upon the rejecting
the Evidence of Miracles, is provok'd to
that Degree, that he withdraws his
Grace. What, finally and irrecovera-
bly? Prove that by any plain *Text* of
Scripture, and the Dispute is at an End.
Is not the extraordinary Guilt of the
Sin sufficient to prove it? No, tho'
the Guilt of the Sin did exceed that of
any other, we shou'd have no Warrant
from Reason to infer this; because there
is no Provocation which is too big for
the infinite Mercy of God to Pardon,
or the infinite Merit of *Christ* to atone.
Nothing but a particular and express
Declaration in sacred *Text*, of God's Re-
solution to do this, can be sufficient to
warrant an Assertion of this Nature;
especially since God has in his *Gospel*
made a Tender of Pardon to all sorts of
Sinners for all sorts of Sins, upon Repen-
tance, in the most general and unlimit-
ed Terms that can be conceiv'd. For
from hence I might with probable Rea-
son infer, that either Divine Grace is
not

Vol. III. not necessary to Repentance, which seems to me wholly repugnant to the Sense of *Scripture* and the *Catholic* Church; or else, that Man is not by the Commission of any Sin so utterly bereav'd of God's Grace, as to be shut up under an Impossibility of Repentance; for this were to render God's Tender of Pardon useless, by annexing an impossible Condition. What if, after all, there should be other Sins of as Crying a Guilt, and consequently of as high Provocation, not to say more? Then this Reason were of very little Moment. By what I have said before, it may be guess'd what might be the Success of an Attempt to prove this: But to proceed in general Terms.

There is one Aggravation of Sin which doth wonderfully increase the Guilt of it, which was not an Ingredient in the Sin of the *Pharisees*. They did indeed obstinately oppose the Truth, but not maliciously, knowing it to be Truth. I need not prove this; our Saviour saith it, *They know not what they do: Their Eyes they have closed, that they cannot see, &c.* St. Peter saith it, *I wot that through Ignorance ye did it, as also did your Rulers.* St. Paul saith it, when speaking of the Wisdom or Truth of the Gospel,

Gospel, he saith, *Which none of the* Vol. III.
Princes of this World knew; for had they
known it, they would not have crucified 
the Lord of Glory. And he imputes his
 own Blasphemy to Ignorance and Unbe-
 lief. 'Tis granted, you need urge no
 farther Proof; the Jews then did resist
 the Truth obstinately, but not mali-
 ciously, or knowing it to be Truth.
 Well then, it follows, that if a Man
 should oppose the Truth maliciously,
 his Guilt and Provocation wou'd exceed
 that of the Jews Persecution or Blasphe-
 my. Yes, but this is impossible. Why?
 You know the Devils oppose that Truth
 which they know to be Truth; there-
 fore 'tis not a thing impossible, it im-
 plies no Contradiction. But it is im-
 possible to Man. I wou'd it were: But
 why do you think so? Because 'tis
 impossible to believe and disbelieve
 the same thing. I grant it, and at the
 same time confess, that if this were
 possible, it wou'd be impossible for any
 Man to oppose the Truth maliciously;
 because the Opposition of such a Man
 wou'd be just like the Temper of his
 Mind, neither malicious, nor yet not
 malicious. But for what Reason can we
 imagine that to Oppose and Disbe-
 lieve, are Terms equivalent? Or that

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Vol. III. no Man can ever oppose a Truth, but he that believes it to be a Falshood? Alas! there is nothing more necessary to enable a Man to oppose what he acknowledges to be a Truth, but this, that his Lust should be stronger than his Reason. How possible a Thing this is, every Man's Experience can inform him. I do not urge this, as if I intended to prove, that every Sin against Conscience were greater than the *Jews* Blasphemy against the *Holy Ghost*; but only to shew, that human Nature is capable of making a malicious Opposition against the Truth. I will add nothing farther upon this Head, only that, *That peculiar way of Expression, Shall never be forgiven in this World, nor that which is to come*, ought not to startle any Body; for *First*, It seems plainly to be equivalent to that of *Mark 3. 29. Hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of Eternal Damnation.* Or, *Secondly*, If it should have any thing extraordinary in it, it might be thought to imply that final Excision of the *Jewish Nation*, which the Rejection of the *Messias* brought upon them, the Foresight of which might cause our *Saviour* to join the Punishment of this World with that of the other.

Thus

Thus far I am apt to flatter my self, I Vol. III.
 have proceeded upon plain and rational
 Grounds. I discover not any Difficulty
 in any of these *Texts* already spoken to,
 but what may in this manner very fairly
 be remov'd; but, I confess, there are
 two *Texts* behind, which are to me so
 intricate and obscure, that I am not
 ashamed to own my self unable to give
 such an Account of them as may be clear
 and convincing enough to deserve to be
 confidently relied on.

The first is *Acts* 8. 22. Repent there-
 fore of this thy Wickedness, and pray
 God, if perhaps the Thought of thine
 Heart may be forgiven thee. What this
 Sin of Simon Magus was, appears from
 Ver. 18, and 19. And when Simon saw
 that thro' laying on of the Apostles Hands,
 the Holy Ghost was given, he offer'd them
 Money, saying, Give me also this Power,
 that on whomsoever I lay Hands, he may
 receive the Holy Ghost. He had an un-
 worthy and dishonourable Thought of
 God, supposing that the Gift of the
 Spirit cou'd be purchased by Money;
 and 'tis not improbable that he design'd
 to desecrate and prostitute the Power to
 unworthy Ends, and to have made a
 Gain, I will not say of Godliness, but

An Attempt
 to explain
Acts 8. 22.

Vol. III. of Miracles. This was the Sin, concerning the Pardon of which *St. Peter* seems to speak so doubtfully, even upon Supposition of true Repentance. The Difficulty now lies here; I have before, by many, and those unanswerable Proofs, demonstrated, that every sincere Penitent is undoubtedly entitled to Pardon of Sins, and Everlasting Salvation. I need not repeat 'em; for who sees not the many dreadful Consequences that wou'd attend such a Position as this, That the Success of true Repentance is doubtful and uncertain; especially where the Sin proceeded only from an ignorant and false Notion, it may be, from a dishonourable Opinion of the *Apostles*, which terminated upon God only by Reflexion and Consequence. All the Comfort *Dr. Hammond* administers is only, that the *Apostle* doth not here affirm the Pardon of this impossible. *Grotius* acknowledges the Success of Repentance uncertain; and instead of extricating, increases the Difficulty, by such Proofs as seem to multiply the Instances and Cases wherein the Event of Repentance is doubtful. *Diodate* indeed thinks *St. Peter* did only represent the Difficulty of obtaining Pardon for this Sin, that so he might at once convince the Sinner of the
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the Hainousness of his Sin, and the Necessity of a strict and extraordinary Repentance. But this is only said; nothing offer'd as a Rational Proof for it. 'Tis not to be question'd but the greater the Sin is, the severer ought the Repentance to be. This is true; but I doubt 'tis not to the Purpose; for *ei ðeg*, or perhaps, doth plainly refer to the doubtful Issue, not to the Difficulty of Repentance. Beza's Distinction between *Bulai* and *Phen* is pretty, but too slight a Criticism for the Salvation of a Soul to depend upon; besides, that we have no Authority, but his bare Affirmation, to persuade us that the Greek *ei ðeg* answers to the former, not the latter more ominous Hebrew Particle. But he took this Notion from Calvin, by whom *Du Veil* also thinks himself sufficiently warranted to affirm, that this Particle *ei ðeg*, which we rightly render perhaps, *non dubitationem aliquam significat, doth not signify any Doubtfulness or Uncertainty of Success.* But this is out-staring or out-facing a Difficulty, not solving it. In this Perplexity, I may be allow'd to offer my Guess, which is this: The Success of *Simon Magus* his Repentance, seems to me to have regard not to his Eternal, but Temporal Punishment;

Vol. III. this is that Success which the *Apostle* pronounces extremely doubtful, even upon Supposal of true Repentance. And I am induced to this Opinion by such Reasons as seem to me to carry a fair Probability with them.

First, St. Peter's Wish, Ver. 20. *Thy Money perish with thee*, seems to me plainly to look this way, for I cannot think that St. Peter cou'd wish him eternally damn'd, but, like an *Apostle*, denounces Temporal Judgments against him, in order to his future Salvation, if they produced sincere Repentance, which was a Method so usual in those miraculous Times, that I need not insist upon the Proof of it. I am farther confirm'd in this Opinion, by the Answer of Simon Magus, ver. 24. *Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me*: Where he seems plainly to have regard to those Judgments and Calamities which the *Apostle* had threatned his Iniquity with, and which did in those Times so generally pursue all hypocritical Professors, that it is hence said, *And of the rest durst no Man join himself unto them*. Which Words I rather understand, with Du Veil, of that Awe which the Death of Ananias and Sapphira had be-gat in the Jews, which kept all back from

from conforthing with the *Apostles* who Vol. III. did not resolve to be thorough and sincere Christians, than of that Reverence which *Dr. Hammond* supposes to have kept all other Christians at a Distance from the *Twelve*, and with-held 'em from entring into a familiar Conversation with them.

There remains now only one Place to be spoken to; and, for ought I can see, it will ever remain still to be spoken to, and never understood. That is, *1 John 3. 16. If any Man see his Brother sin a Sin which is not unto Death, he shall ask, and he shall give him Life for them that sin not unto Death. There is a Sin unto Death: I do not say he shall pray for it.* To interpret this of Venial and Mortal Sin, in a *Pepish* Sense of the Distinction, is so gross an Absurdity, that 'tis fit to be obtruded upon none but Men of implicit Faith and blind Obedience; for the most Venial Sin in this Text is so mortal, that 'tis plainly suppos'd to deserve Death, did not the Mediation of another's Prayer deliver the guilty Man from it, and the Life that is there given such a one, is owing not to the lightness of the Offender's Crime, but to the Dignity of the Inter-

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An Attempt
to explain
*1 John 3.
16.*

Vol. III, ceder's Faith, *He shall ask, and God shall give him Life.* To interpret it of Venial and Mortal Sins in the *Geneva* Sense, (which is, That all the Sins of the Elect are Venial, of the Reprobate Mortal) is as trifling as the other is a confident Absurdity, for I know not of what Use this can be here, unless Saints had Ear-marks, or we all had that Faculty, which I have been told somebody in *Holland* had, of seeing Souls and Spirits, so that we cou'd discern, and that thro' the gross Body too, the Complexions of the Minds of Men, and thence infallibly distinguish the Elect from the Reprobate. To interpret it of Apostacy (as *Calvin* doth,) or of Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, wou'd carry indeed with it a shew of Probability, with those who believe these Sins utterly unpardonable: But if they be not, which, I think, I have sufficiently prov'd, then, methinks, the Prohibition of making Intercession for such as are capable of Repentance and Pardon, will contain an inexplicable Difficulty. Besides, whoever marks the *Greek* well, will easily see that *St. John* speaks here, not of one single Sin, but of a Species of Sins, and a Man may with as much Reason believe that some one

one particular Sin is signified by the Sin *Vol. III.*
which is not unto Death, as confine the Sin unto Death to any one particular Sin; for the Text speaks as indefinitely and indeterminately of the one as of the other, *There is a Sin unto Death*, ver. 16. — *And there is a Sin not unto Death*, ver. 17. Grotius, and out of him Dr. Hammond, and both out of the second Council of Nice, understand by Sin unto Death, incorrigible Sin, such as the Offender persists in, in obstinate Defiance of Ecclesiastical Censure; such a proud and daring Sinner having no Right to the Prayers, any more than to the Communion of the Church. This, I confess, seems to me the most probable Account of this Place of any that I have met with; and yet I have two Things to object against it.

First, Not to enter into a tedious Examination of the Ecclesiastical Usage or Custom in this Point, I cannot be satisfactorily convinced from any Text of the New Testament, that Apostolical Practice gives any Countenance to this Opinion, That they who were excluded from the Benefit of the Church's Communion, were also utterly excluded from any Interest in its Prayers, or in the Prayers of any particular Christian; especially

Vol. III. especially when I consider that *Place of*
 *St. Paul to Timothy, 2 Epist. chap. 2.*
 ver. 24. &c. where, describing the
 Office of a Bishop, he saith, *And the*
 2 Tim. 2. *Servant of the Lord must not strive; but*
 24, 25, 26. *be gentle unto all Men, apt to teach,*
patient, in meekness instructing those that
oppose themselves; if God peradventure
will give them Repentance to the acknow-
ledging of the Truth; and that they may
recover themselves out of the Snare of the
Devil, who are taken captive by him at
his Will. Whether these were under
 Ecclesiastical Censure, I dare not deter-
 mine; but this I am sure, they deserv'd
 to have been so; for *St. Paul* represents
 them under a dreadful Character, Slaves
 of *Satan* and Enemies to the Truth,
 guilty at once of Heresy and Immorali-
 ty, either of which was a Crime big
 enough to have provok'd the Apostolical
 Rod. In a word, their Case was de-
 sperate, and their Recovery extremely
 doubtful; they seem to have been either
 Gnostic Apostates, or next degree to 'em;
 but whatever they were, they were
 Contumaces & *Prasfracti*, proud and ob-
 stinate Opposers of the Gospel, (as *Calvin*
 well infers from that Duty of Patience
 which *St. Paul* prescribes the *Servant of*
the Lord towards them.) And can I
 think

think now that it became the Charity of Vol. III.
 a Pastor to endeavour both by Instruction and Patience the Recovery of such as these, and that it cou'd become the Charity of the Church to exclude 'em even from a Share in their Prayers? Well may that Attempt be desperate indeed, which we are not allowed to second with our Prayers. Or how can St. Paul's Expectation of God's giving Repentance to incorrigible Sinners, consist with St. John's Assertion, That it is to no Purpose to pray for 'em?

My Second Objection against this Interpretation is this, I am not able to comprehend any *vision*, (as *Grotius* speaks,) or Figure of Construction, that can give me any Colour to understand these Words, of the Prayers of the Church, which do so expressly speak of particular Christians *inquit*, &c. If any Man see ~~any~~ he shall ask, &c. especially when I consider, that the Intercession for a Brother, here spoken of, is grounded upon a Confidence not peculiar to the Church, but belonging to every good Christian. And this is the Confidence that we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his Will, he heareth us. And if the Direction of this *Perse* be address'd to every particular

John 5:
14.

Vol. III. cular Christian, then the Difficulty increases. For tho' the Ends of Prudence might be serv'd by such a piece of Ecclesiastical Discipline as this, which, for the greater Terror to obstinate and contumacious Offenders, might prohibit any publick Intercession to be made for 'em; yet how can the prohibiting or discouraging particular Christians from recommending the Case of such to God, in their private Devotions, consist with the Obligation of Christian Charity? These are the Inconveniences with which this Interpretation is clog'd, tho' it seems to me to carry a much fairer shew of Probability than any other; and when I consider how close and strict the Tie of Ecclesiastical Communion was in those Days, I cannot be very unwilling to believe, that each single Christian might act nothing in a Matter of such a Nature as publick Contumacy, but jointly with the Church, or at least conformably to its Rules.

But besides these several Opinions concerning the Sin in this *Text*, the Words are capable of several other Constructions; and the Difficulty is not how to find out such a Sense as will free 'em from justling and opposing the great Fundamental and Gospel Doctrine of Pardon

Pardon of Sins, whatever they be, to the true Penitent, but to determine which, of many, is the natural and genuine Sense of St. *John*. Thus, to make some Essay of other Interpretations, these Words, *I do not say he shall pray for it*, may be limited by the Context, so as that they may not signify either, that it is not permitted us to intercede for some sort of Sins, or, that our Intercession will be altogether vain and fruitless; but only, that he cou'd not give us the same Assurance of the Success of our Prayers in some Cases, as in others; some Sins having so much of Ignorance or Infirmary, or so little; at least, -of Obstinacy in them, that our Prayers in this case wou'd be sure to be heard; when others might have so much of Wilfulness and Malignity in 'em, that he cou'd not promise us what wou'd be the Event of our Prayer.

As to those other Words, *God shall give him Life for them that sin not unto Death*; they may be subject to very different Descants: For whether the Thing here obtain'd, and express'd by *Life*, be Repentance unto Life, which we beg for such as live in a State of Sin; or whether it be Pardon, which includes Life in it, which we beg for such as are troubled

Vol. III. troubled and afflicted under the Conscience of Sin, and have commenced the State of Repentance; or whether, *lastly*, by *Life*, be signified Deliverance from those Temporal Judgments which God did commonly in those Days inflict upon Offenders, or the Prevention of them, is not a Matter very easy to determine. But either of these may be understood, without asserting any Sin unpardonable, upon true Repentance. For thus, God may not be prevail'd with, by our Prayers, to exert an extraordinary Power for the Recovery of an obstinate Sinner, or Apostatiz'd Christian; and yet if such a one, making use of such Means as God has left him, shou'd begin to lay to Heart the Desperateness of his State, and betake himself to God by true Repentance, 'tis not to be question'd but he may find Mercy; and tho' God may not pardon some sort of Sins of our Brother upon our Prayers, yet he may upon the Strictness, Humility, and Continuance of his own Repentance. And, *finally*, tho' some Sins may be so provoking, that God may immutably resolve to chastise them with severe Temporal Judgments; yet so far ought we to be from concluding thence, That any such Sinner is excluded from
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all Hopes of Everlasting Happiness, that, Vol. III.
on the quite contrary, the Scripture
declares nothing more plainly than that
the Chastisements of God are in order
to Repentance first, and then Pardon.

After all, I must confess, I have been
often inclin'd to interpret this Place of
St. John by that of St. James, *Confess James 5:
your Faults one to another, and pray one 16.
for another, that ye may be heal'd*; un-
derstanding by a Sin unto Death, such
Sins as God would not be intreated for,
but was unalterably resolved to punish
with sore Judgments in this Life; and
by a Sin not unto Death, such Sins as
did not carry such Degrees of Provoca-
tion in them, and consequently such for
which God did more easily admit of
the Intercession of his Saints.

And that which mov'd me to this was,
that I observ'd several Footsteps of this
way of God's Dealing with Men in
Apostolical Times. Thus we find God
punishing the Profanation of the Holy
Sacrament amongst the *Corinthians*, 1 Cor. 11.
*For this Cause many are weak and sickly among
you, and some sleep.* But when I confi-
der'd that *Life*, in the Language of the
New Testament, doth generally (I think
I may say, constantly) signify Eternal
Life, and *Death* Eternal Death, unless
there

Vol. III. there were something added to determine their Signification to this World, I cou'd not think that this Interpretation stood upon solid Grounds.

But sometimes, when we have strain'd, and cast about, and turn'd to every side to explain a Difficulty, we miss, only because we overlook the easy and obvious Solution; and so, for ought I know, it may be here, and the plain Sense of these Words may be no more than this, That we are not to hope to obtain, by our Intercession, God's Pardon for such Sins of others as they commit with a high hand, and persist in impudently and obstinately, in Defiance of the Long-suffering or Chastisements of God, or in Contempt of the Patience or Reproof of his Servants. The Case of such Men is the same with theirs in the *Prophet*, for whom God resolv'd that he wou'd accept no Mediation of others, *Tho' these three Men, Noah, Daniel, and Job were in it, (i. e. in that Land or Nation,) they should deliver but their own Souls by their Righteousness, saith the Lord God.* This shews us how far the Force and Efficacy of Intercession may extend, when put up for such as persist incorrigibly in their Sins: But he that should here resolve, that the sincere Repentance

Ezek. 14.
14.

Vol. III.
penitance of such Sinners would have been as useless and unsuccessful, as the Charity of an interceding Brother would infer much more than the Premises will bear; and not only something more, but, I believe, something contrary to what *Scripture* asserts: For though from the *Place* of *Ezekiel*, 'tis plain that the Mediation of *Noah*, *Daniel*, and *Job* would not be able to divert those Judgments, which God denounceth against the Crying Sins of a Rebellious and Obstinate People; yet 'tis as plain, from *Jer.* 18. that the Repentance of such would be (far be from me the Vanity of asserting confidently, that this is the Sense of this *Place*, that 'tis so natural that there can no Objection lie against it) so easy, that it were to be wonder'd at, how Men could make a shift to miss it. Alas! I know that those very Notions which I have highly valued at first, I have afterward had just Reason not only to despise, but also to despise my self for the Value I set upon them: And the Confidence with which any Man obtrudes his Sense upon the World, is ever wont to raise in me only the greater Suspicion of the Man and his Tenet. I do not therefore pretend to define any Thing positively concerning the Interpretation of this *Text*; only thus much

Vol. III. I think I may assert positively, That it cannot be concluded demonstratively from this *Text*, that there is any Sin, or State of Sin, which is incapable of Pardon, upon true Repentance; since there are so many several Senses it will admit of, none of which do imply any such Thing; and upon the whole, it doth only tell us how far the Intercession of one Christian for another, not how far the Repentance of a Sinner may prevail for the Pardon of his own Sins. And this is enough to the Purpose of my *Enquiry*, which was only to prove, That this *Text* did not pronounce any sort of Men incapable of *Happiness*.

And thus I have endeavour'd, by a just Representation of the Proceedings of God, and the State of Man in this Life, to preserve him from such Opinions as might betray him into Despondencies and Despair, and so extinguish in him those Desires, and discourage him from those Attempts, which alone can become the Dignity of a Rational Creature, and entitle him to the Approbation and Rewards of God.

I am not ignorant how ill a Use some Men will be apt to make of this Discourse: They will flatter themselves
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into Security and Confidence in their Vol. III.
Sins, from a Prospect of the Easiness of Pardon; such is the Malignity of some Diseases, that the Stomach turns the most wholesome Food not into Nourishment, but Morbifick Matter: Such is the Wickedness of some Dispositions, that they abuse the Favours and Blessings of God into Instruments of Luxury and Sensuality, and pervert his Mercy and Compassion into an Occasion of Carnal Security and Presumption. But I must tell such, That 'tis one thing to assert the Possibility, another to assert the Easiness of obtaining Pardon for the greatest Sins; 'tis one Thing to promise Life to the truly Penitent, another to promise Repentance to the Obstinate and Presumptuous. I am so far from thinking that God will accept a slight and easy Repentance for wilful and presumptuous Sins, that I believe such do seldom escape severe Chastisements and sharp Calamities even in this World, though they be truly repented of, unless by voluntary Inflictions, by the Excess and Continuance of our Humiliation, we prevent them: *For if we would judge our selves, we should not be judged.* 1 Cor. 11: I know, every wilful Sin wounds the Conscience, grieves and chases away the Holy

Vol. III. Holy Spirit; and that the Repetition of
 ~~~~~ such Sins renders our State more and  
 more desperate, betraying us into a  
 Reprobate Sense, and a wretched for-  
 lorn Condition; and then we stand up-  
 on the Brink of a Dismal Precipice,  
 where the least Puff of the Divine In-  
 dignation o'erthrows us Eternally. I  
 know, that tho' much Patience and great  
 Longanimity in God be necessary to our  
 Repentance and our Happiness; yet one,  
 the least, Spark of his Fiery Indigna-  
 tion is sufficient to work our Ruin: And  
 I know, that tho' God be slow to re-  
 solve and decree our Misery, yet he is  
 sudden and irresistible in the Execution  
 of it. *When our Fear cometh, it will  
 come (as Solomon words it) like Desola-  
 tion, and our Destruction as a Whirl-  
 wind.* And these Considerations are suf-  
 ficient to abate the Presumption, and  
 awaken the Fear and Jealousy of the  
 most confident Sinner.

Prov. i.

F I N I S.

17 AP. 66

